

***Good
Business
Letters***

GOOD BUSINESS LETTERS

HOW TO CREATE, WRITE AND
DICTATE THEM

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"CORRECT PUNCTUATION AND EFFECTIVE
SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION," ETC.



LONDON
W. FOULSHAM & CO. LTD.
NEW YORK · TORONTO · CAPE TOWN · SYDNEY

First published 1920

W. FOULSHAM & CO., LTD.

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

by C. Tinling & Co., Ltd., Liverpool, London and Prescott.

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Foreword

THROUGHOUT this book, copious brief examples have been embodied in the text to illustrate the various points touched upon. It has not been deemed advisable, however, to adorn the text with separate illustrations of such things as "modern" letterheads, "latest" office printing machines, filing systems, appliances, etc.

This omission is deliberate. Whereas the principles involved in the production of good business letters are well established and subject to relatively little change, the illustrations of materials tend to become out of date, so rapidly do type styles and design "fashions" change; and so persistently do office equipment manufacturers vie with each other in producing new and improved models.

It is felt that the practical utility of this handbook is in no way discounted by the omission of pages of illustrations; on the contrary, additional room has been provided for informative text. Moreover, it is possible to put into practice a modern equivalent of the old system of "grangerizing" a book.

Those who feel that additional examples would be helpful can collect these and store them in a suitable file. Examples of attractive letterheads, convincing sales letters, novel folders, typical post order forms, illustrations of office appliances, specimens of business printing, envelopes, etc. can be collected. As new examples are obtained, older and less attractive specimens can be discarded, and the whole collection thus easily and automatically be kept up to date.

The plan has this advantage, that each reader can collect those printed examples which are calculated to be of the most practical value to him, and illustrations of appliances,

the ultimate purchase of which can be envisaged. (The small trader is not very interested in an illustration of a £350 power-operated office-printing machine.)

GOOD BUSINESS LETTERS

CHAPTER ONE

Good English the Basis of Good Letters

THE cause of much poor, faulty or frankly bad letter-writing is the extraordinary idea which prevails that a kind of language is required for letter-writing different from that used for ordinary business intercourse. This has brought into existence an appalling mode of writing called "business jargon." On the principle that the only way to cure a bad habit is to put a good one in its place, the primary purpose of this book is to show how business jargon may be exchanged for simple, straightforward, unambiguous language.

Letter-writing does not differ from any other form of creative writing. Its purpose is to convey from one person (or group of persons) to another person (or group of persons) certain ideas. These should be expressed in the fewest possible words consistent with absolute lucidity. Clearly, good English is the only basis of good business letters.

What is good English? This is a very big subject, but fortunately we have to consider it only from our immediate standpoint. What we write should be free from grammatical blemishes, and also free from the slightest possibility of being misunderstood. First, last and all the time, the need is for clarity. Days and weeks of time and thousands of pounds are wasted every year through loosely written business letters giving rise to misunderstanding. Actually, the whole matter works in a circle. Clear writing can only emerge from clear thinking; and the habit of thinking clearly is enormously helped by practice in precise writing.

Write Simply for Clearness

The arch-enemy of clear expression is that dreadful thing, the "literary touch." Anything savouring of "fine writing"

is totally out of place in commercial correspondence. Seldom do you meet a business man who has the courage to write a letter consisting, apart from the salutation and courtesy close, of the single word "yes." Yet how many business letters, when they are boiled down from two or three sentences, or even two or three paragraphs, amount to nothing more than this simple affirmative! Successful business men have mastered the art of concise expression; but many would-be big business men seem so obsessed with their own dignity that they have to dress up the simplest expressions of opinion in a plethora of words. Such men should never be allowed the services of a stenographer, or the use of a Dictaphone. They should be made to write every letter by hand. This would teach them to be concise, and almost certainly with conciseness would come precision. The art of good business letter-writing may be very quickly summarised as the use of simple words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Nothing can usefully be added to that.

Finding the Exactly Right Words

An extensive vocabulary is most desirable—not in order that the possessor may display his erudition by the use of a very large number of unfamiliar words, but in order that he may have at his disposal exactly the right word for every occasion. Search long and think hard for the word which conveys your precise meaning beyond any possibility of misunderstanding. Far too much business correspondence is a mass of verbal approximations. One clear, concise sentence stands out from the rest like a jewel in a sea of mud. The majority of business men do not dictate letters; they flounder in a sea of words, in which all too often they only succeed in drowning their ideas. Let us repeat our objective—SIMPLE WORDS, SHORT SENTENCES, SHORT PARAGRAPHS.

Simplify, Not Elaborate

The art of writing good English, like every other art, is only acquired by diligent practice. Many people imagine that practice in writing means exercising one's ingenuity in saying the simplest things in the most involved and round-

about way. In other words, they practise elaboration whereas the true art of writing is in the practice of simplification. To take a simple statement and dress it up to several times the original length in flowery language is not practising good writing. Infinitely better practice is it to take a long statement and to re-write it again and again, steadily simplifying and compressing it until it is perhaps no more than a quarter its original length. Very few business letters which are dictated could not be re-written to half their original length, with a corresponding gain in clarity.

Business in these highly competitive days is very largely a duel of wits, and it never does to under-estimate the quality of your opponent's steel. You should give him credit for being as quick in the mental uptake as you are yourself, and possibly a little quicker. At the same time, in business correspondence it is an excellent thing to remember the advice which a famous editor once gave to a contributor to his magazine. He said "I want you to imagine that the readers of my magazine are half-witted housemaids, and to write so that they cannot possibly misunderstand you." An exaggeration admittedly, but unquestionably the right idea. Never expect anything to be read into your letter beyond what is actually stated. If you have ever to excuse a misunderstanding arising from anything you have written by some such observation as "Well, their intelligence should have told them," register a black mark against yourself. Never rely on the other man's intelligence to make good your own deficiencies.

Business Jargon

Reference was made at the beginning of this chapter to "business jargon," and it may be expected that something more will be said on this oft-discussed subject. The vice of jargon in letters has so often been animadverted against that the denunciations are in danger of becoming as wearisome as the fault itself! Let us therefore be merciful and brief, and give only a few examples of the kind of threadbare phrases and involved sentences which should be avoided; in some instances because they are examples of circumlocution—saying a simple thing in a long-winded way—and in others because they are virtually meaningless.

- (1) We beg to acknowledge receipt of your favour of even date.
- (2) Pursuant of your favour duly to hand . . .
- (3) In response to your esteemed enquiry, we have pleasure in informing you . . .
- (4) We are in receipt of your letter of yesterday's date and have given same our most careful consideration, but regret to have to inform you that your proposition is unacceptable to us at this present juncture.
- (5) In re the garment you specified in your valued order, same was sent forward on the 18th inst. per pass. train, and trust same has now been duly received by you.
- (6) We beg to enclose herewith particulars of our proposition, which we trust you will give your kind consideration.
- (7) Assuring you of our best attention at all times . . .
- (8) Thanking you in anticipation of a continuance of past favours, we beg to remain . . .

Here are examples (1) to (6) translated into plain English. Examples (7) and (8) are invariably quite superfluous, and no translation has been attempted.

- (9) We thank you for your letter, dated to-day.
- (10) As requested, . . .
- (11) We are pleased to tell you that . . .
- (12) We are sorry we cannot at present agree to the proposal made in your letter of August 12th.
- (13) The Sports Coat (your order 3974, Aug. 12th) was despatched by passenger train on the 18th, and doubtless has reached you by now.
- (14) Enclosed are particulars of our Radio Hire Plan, which we are confident will interest you.

Example (4): We waste a lot of time telling people that we have received their letters and have studied their contents, when, if in our reply we were to plunge straight into the subject, it would be obvious that we had done both.

Example (6): Note the stupid "enclosed herewith." How is it possible to "enclose" anything without it being "herewith"? Certain phrases, such as "we have pleasure" and "we regret" are on the border line of business jargon, but they may be excused on the grounds that they are courtesy phrases intended to soften what would otherwise be too bald statements of fact.

An Exemplary Letter

To round off this chapter, here are examples of a letter full of jargon and loose phraseology, and the same letter re-written as it is suggested it should be.

(15) Dear Sirs,

We beg to acknowledge receipt of your favour of yesterday's date, marked for the attention of our Mr. Buck who we regret to have to inform you is away from the office confined to his bed with illness and therefore unable to give his usual close personal attention to your valued instructions now to hand. Same are however being promptly attended to by the writer.

I regret to have to inform you that we are right out of stock of Inlaid Lino No. 81 in Green until further supplies come to hand from the factory, which we anticipate will not be for 10-14 days from date.

We can however substitute Inlaid Lino. 154 in Green if you can take this as nearest from stock. Will you therefore kindly favour us with your instructions as to whether we may substitute, or will you prefer to wait, pending delivery of No. 81, as ordered?

Assuring you of our best intentions at all times,

Yours faithfully,

pp. London Linoleums, Ltd.,
Thos. Green.

(16) Dear Sirs,

Your Order No. 8371 : 15-8-37.

We are sorry we cannot supply Inlaid Linoleum No. 81, in Green, under 10-14 days.

We can, however, give you immediate delivery of Inlaid Linoleum No. 154, in Green, which is very similar in pattern to No. 81. A sample is enclosed.

Please let us know whether we are to substitute No. 154, or book your order for No. 81, to be delivered as soon as new stocks are received from the factory.

The writer would like to explain that he is dealing with your order, in the absence of Mr. Buck through sickness.

Yours very truly,
pp. London Linoleums, Ltd.,
Thos. Green.

Note how the second letter gives precedence to the customer's order, and mentions the relatively unimportant matter of the sickness of a member of its staff only at the end.

CHAPTER TWO

Faults to Avoid

At the risk of being thought wearisome I am going to repeat that the fault to avoid at all costs in letter-writing is ambiguity. What you write should be capable of one interpretation only, and that should be the interpretation you intended it to have. This is not a book of grammar. At the end of this chapter are given the titles of some inexpensive works on Grammar and Writing which should be studied in conjunction with this present volume. In this way much needless repetition will be avoided.

Faulty Syntax ~~xxix~~ *xxix*

It is, however, desirable to refer to certain faults which gain a false importance by reason of their prevalence. Here, to begin with, are some examples of faulty syntax, in which the sense of the respective sentences is obscured by reason of bad arrangement of their parts. Faulty syntax is dangerous because it can distort the writer's meaning, not always with merely humorous effect. The correct sentence follows each example.

- (17) Your suit needs pressing badly.
- (18) Your suit badly needs pressing.
- (19) We are sorry you have had to complain of the freshness of our eggs and our assistants.
- (20) We are sorry you have had to complain of lack of freshness in our eggs, and of slackness on the part of our assistants.
- (21) We are sending you an antique clock by our Mr. Black, with ornamental hands and engraved face.
- (22) We are sending you, by our Mr. Black, an antique clock, with ornamental hands and engraved face.

- (23) This specific contains a medicament used by a famous hospital which seldom fails to effect a cure.
- (24) This specific contains a medicament which seldom fails to effect a cure, as used by a famous hospital.

Wrong Number

A very common fault in business letters is change of number. If the typical business man does not find the letters he dictates a confused mixture of "I" and "we" it is because his typist has had the good sense to change one for the other. It would be wrong to say that all letters emanating from the offices of a Company should be written in the plural, though this rule would certainly hold good for all formal correspondence. The head of a business may at times be expressing his personal views, in which event it would be both natural and correct for him to use the singular number. The essential thing is to be consistent, and to sign the letter in the correct way. In example (25) below, a letter written in the plural number is correctly signed. Such a signature would however be out of place when affixed to a letter written in the singular number, when the signature would be better given as in example (26). In example (25) it is clearly the Company which is expressing its views through the mouthpiece of its Managing Director. In example (26), however, the individual is speaking, and his title is added in order to show by what authority he is writing in this way. Only the concluding sentences of the letters are given in each case.

- (25) We must therefore reserve to ourselves the right to safeguard our interests in every way we think proper.

Yours very truly,
p.p. X.Y.Z. Company, Ltd.
(Signed) John Jones
Managing Director.

- (26) I shall be most happy to use my influence with the Board on your behalf.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) John Jones
Managing Director
X.Y.Z. Company, Ltd.

Wrong number can also give rise to grammatical slips, some examples of which are given below. In each case the correct form follows the incorrect form.

- (27) The Committee were of the opinion . . .
- (28) The Committee was of the opinion . . .
- (29) The series, comprising ten short stories in all, are available for republication.
- (30) The series, comprising ten short stories in all, is available for republication.
- (31) None of the 27 passengers in the coach were injured.
- (32) None of the 27 passengers in the coach was injured.

In this connection, remember the schooldays pitfall of the subjunctive mood, in which the singular noun is followed by the verb in the plural form. The subjunctive mood is used when supposition, doubt or a wish is expressed, as in these examples :

- (33) Assuming that I were disposed to grant your request . . .
- (34) If he were to ask me . . .
- (35) If I were king . . .
- (36) I would I were a tiny bird.
- (37) Unless he were to cancel the order.

The Double Negative

The double negative is another trap for the unwary. The rule is of course that a double negative makes a positive, but in some instances a double negative is used where no positive is intended. The irate sales manager who wrote to a salesman :

(38) You have sent in no orders for weeks past, only excuses, for nothing we can supply from stock . . . did not mean what he wrote. Here is another gem from real life, of sheer bad English :

(39) Neither of the three samples you send is the correct shade, and are of no interest to us.
This should be :

(40) No one of the three samples you send is of the correct shade, or is of any interest to us.
Either and *neither* should be used only where two things are concerned. For three or more, use *any* or *not any*.

Anacoluthon

Grammarians have given the rather terrifying name of *anacoluthon* to the fault of ending a sentence with a grammatical construction which is at variance with that used for the opening part of the sentence. Here are two examples of *anacoluthon*, with their correct forms :

- (41) Cannot we make you understand that—unless we succeed in getting their patents set aside—how are we to go in for large scale production?
- (42) Cannot we make you understand that—unless we succeed in getting their patents set aside—we dare not go in for large scale production?
- (43) Supposing we were disposed to take the risk, we shall have all the other problems still to solve.
- (44) Supposing we were disposed to take the risk, we should still have all the other problems to solve.

Anacoluthon is very apt to creep in where long and involved sentences are used, because the dictator goes floundering on, hoping by adding yet more clauses to his tortuous sentence to make the sense clear.

We now come to some faults which are blemishes of expression rather than of grammar. Frankly, we are much more concerned with crystal-clear expression than with the finer points of grammar. Self-expression is the quick substance of our every-day lives, while grammar belongs largely to professors and text-books.

Overdone Superlatives

Here are some examples of overdone superlatives—quite a common fault in business writing.

- (45) This gigantic catalogue of super-bargains . . .
- (46) The breath-taking value we offer you . . .

- (47) The superlative beauty and most exquisite tone of this masterpiece of Radio construction . . .
- (48) This creation of a supreme master of the art of coiffure . . .

Moving picture production has provided us with perhaps the most laughable examples of overdone superlatives, when a dull and ordinary film is described as a "gigantic, smashing, stupendous, miraculous, epoch-marking production."

The Wrong Viewpoint

A more serious fault is the adoption of the wrong viewpoint. By this is meant that the letter is written primarily from the viewpoint of the sender, whereas it will be read from the viewpoint of the recipient. This is particularly important in that type of business letter which is intended to get from the recipient some action which is favourable to the sender. The obvious example is, of course, the Sales Letter.

A letter which is intended to sell something should present that article from the viewpoint of the recipient, with the sender keeping himself as much in the background as possible. This is a point which is dealt with at greater length in Chapter Nine, and a single paragraph example will suffice here.

- (49) In opening our new London Showroom, with a floor-space area four times as large as the old, we have brought to fruition a plan of development which was thought out only a year ago. Ours is the fastest growing firm in the Metallic Paint trade—a fact of which we are justifiably proud.
- (50) You are cordially invited to call in at the new London Showrooms, where you will find every facility and permanent demonstrations of the extremely wide range of old and new uses to which our Metallic Paints can be put. These London Showrooms exist for your convenience and service, and we look forward to your making extensive use of them.

A symptom of the wrong viewpoint is the excessive use *I, my, we* and *ours*. Notice how, in example (50), stress is laid on *you* and *your*.

Worn-Out Phrases

Very familiar advice to the would-be writer of good English is to avoid the use of clichés, i.e., threadbare expressions which by over-use have lost much of their original force. Here are some examples of clichés which might find their way into business letters, particularly sales letters :

- (51) The cup that cheers.
- (52) Leave no stone unturned.
- (53) Once in a blue moon.
- (54) Take our own medicine.
- (55) The chance of a lifetime.
- (56) The sleep of the just.
- (57) Hearth and home.
- (58) His Majesty the Baby.
- (59) The bosom of your family.
- (60) Well-earned rest.
- (61) The end of a perfect day.
- (62) Prevention is better than cure.

Stock phrases are apt to be especially annoying when they are not even correct. Quite a number of persons talk about "gilding the lily" when the correct reference is to *painting the lily and gilding refined gold*.

Needless Inversion

A horrible, jarring vice which has spread from American sensational journalism to Fleet Street is the constant and needless use of the literary trick of inversion. In good writing, inversion is used with the greatest restraint, to give freshness and force. When overdone, it not only becomes very wearisome, but positively nauseating to anyone who loves the beautiful English language. Here are some typical examples of inversion for inversion's sake.

- (63) Straight from our Paris House, these delightful garments have come.
- (64) Greater value ~~than ours~~, never have we offered

- (65) Gladly sent on approval will be this exquisite Fur Wrap, at 9 gns. an amazing bargain.
- (66) Full of new ideas, returned from New York last week, Mr. Coote, our Studio Manager.

Inversion is by no means necessarily always or wholly bad. At times, its use imparts a most desirable liveliness to what is written. The secret of its successful use is restraint. At times, inversion is both correct and powerful. The exclamatory remark is a case in point.

- (67) How extremely becoming to the matron is this Bridge Coat in gold and silver brocade!
- (68) With what envy do her friends regard her hair!

Again we would emphasise that there is nothing to be said against inversion as a legitimate and useful literary device, but only against its prostitution as a mere trick of writing.

Contractions *‘K. P. M. 34’*

Contractions provide a number of pitfalls. In example (69) below a number of recognised contractions have been used, some correctly, some incorrectly. The paragraph would be more correctly written as in (70).

- (69) The no. of Sports Coats despatched to your Co. by pass. train between Aug. 9th '37 and Sept. 5th '37 was 27, and these were included in our a/c at the month end. Our del. note was No. 12986, d/19-8-37.
- (70) The number of Sports Coats despatched to your Company by passenger train between August 9th and September 5th, 1937, was 27, and these were included in our account at the month end. Our delivery note was No. 12986, dated August 19th.

Some contractions which are permissible in documents, such as invoices, statements, etc., are out of place in correspondence. Typists often are puzzled by the words *Company* and *Limited*—when should these be contracted to *Co.* and *Ltd.* respectively? Invariably, the word *Limited*, as part of a company's title, is by custom contracted to *Ltd.* There is a choice with the word *Company*. Some concerns have a preference for the word in full, as shown on their letterhead.

Others countenance the contraction. Quite a good working rule is to use the contracted form after the names of individuals, as here :

(71) Smith, Robinson & Co., Ltd.

but the word in full when the concern has a descriptive name, as here :

(72) Vulcan Engineering Company, Ltd.

Another method of determining choice is to use the word in full where the concern is unlimited, and the abbreviation before the word *Ltd.*, as here :

(73) The Rialto Radio Company.

(74) The Rialto Radio Co., Ltd.

Really, the question of correctness or otherwise does not arise. It is a matter of usage and personal preference. But be consistent in your practice. Frame your own rules and stick to them.

Prolixity ~~and~~ *Length*

In the first chapter something was said on the fault of prolixity—using too many words. The idea—what is intended to be conveyed—is the soul or *raison d'être* of the sentence ; words are merely its dress. The more words you use to dress an idea, the less opportunity that idea has to stand out clear and stark. One example must suffice :

(75) We have instituted the most careful and intensive investigation into the cause of your complaint, and the net result of our investigations is that no member of our staff can call to mind the receipt from you of a package containing the three-piece suit which you now complain we have lost, nor have we any written record of it in our books.

(76) Following the most careful search, we regret we can trace no record of the receipt of your three-piece suit, nor has any member of our staff any recollection of it.

Fashionable Words

From time to time certain words become “fashionable,” and are freely used, often in the most nonsensical way.

Here are five examples, in which the fashionable words are italicised :

- (77) This Catalogue is our big *broadcast* of bargains for 1938.
- (78) Come and see this *Cavalcade* of Fashion.
- (79) We shall be interested to have your *reaction*.
- (80) A *parade* of value in every department.
- (81) This *streamlined* version of Shakespeare's "Tempest."

Words Misused

Persons with limited vocabularies are forced to use the relatively few words they know without any great regard for their precise meaning. Here are some examples of words misused.

(82) No bigger bargains anywhere in the universe.
The universe includes the sun, planets, stars, etc. *Universal* is frequently used where *world-wide* is meant—and even that is an absurd exaggeration.

(83) All our goods are guaranteed.
Guaranteed is a sadly abused word. The sentence quoted is absolutely meaningless. Guaranteed to be what, or against what? Something must be guaranteed. *Warranted* is often a much better word to use, because almost always there is an implied warranty with goods sold.

(84) This most unique Tea Service . . .
Either a thing is unique or it is not. The word means the only one of its kind, and is capable of no qualification. *Most unique* is absurd, and doubly so when applied to such a thing as a tea service.

(85) Our enormous stocks must be cleared at terrific reductions.
Enormous as an adjective indicative of largeness has become almost acceptable by sheer pressure of usage. But why use it when we have perfectly good words like *huge*, *extensive*—not to say *stupendous*, *gigantic*? Exactly the same applies to *terrific*. Were the reductions really expected to strike terror to our hearts?

(86) We cannot entertain your proposition.
Proposal is the correct word, so why not use it?

(87) Grasp this magnificent offer of a 1s. tin for 9d. !
 Do we grasp an offer? We can accept an offer and grasp an opportunity. And surely a 3d. reduction scarcely justifies the epithet *magnificent*.

Muddled Thinking—Loose Writing

Poor English often arises from muddled thinking or want of care. Here are two examples, the first taken from an actual advertisement.

(88) With this free offer you can make six tasty little cakes for afternoon tea.
 The mistake arises here from confusion of the abstract (offer) with the concrete (what was offered). What was meant, of course, was :

(89) With the free packet of bun flour you can make . . .
 (90) No Chocolate in the World like Blank's !
 If there is no chocolate in the world like Blank's, what do Blank's make? The sentence can only take on some semblance of sense, and not much then, if we write :

(91) No other Chocolate in the World like Blank's !

Faulty Punctuation

Many examples of faulty punctuation can be found in a typical morning's post, but this is an aspect of our subject which justifies a chapter (Six) to itself.

Pompous Language

Some people seem obsessed with their own dignity in business, and their letters are full of pompous phraseology. Generally speaking, it is found that the more insignificant a concern, the more it is given to pompous language in its letters. Here is an example :

(92) This Company exacts a very high standard from its suppliers, and before we could even consider the possibility of commissioning you to prepare designs for our forthcoming printed matter, we should require to be convinced that your artists and writers are

possessed of a measure of skill and degree of aesthetic perception compatible with the reputation this Company has earned for its own products.

All of which means :

- (93) We are not yet satisfied you can turn out the kind of work we want.

Colloquial Expressions

Vigorous and vivid language is to be preferred to pompous phraseology, but colloquial expressions should not degenerate into slang. In example (94) below, the colloquialism employed is perhaps justified, but in example (95) we have pure slang which is definitely out of place in a business letter.

- (94) Every time our salesman calls he is shown the door.

- (95) You ask us for suggestions and every time we submit an idea you give it the bird.

Styles to be Avoided

Here are some styles to be avoided. The examples are given solely to show how *not* to write.

The "Uriah Heep" style :

- (96) We beg to ask the great favour of your very kind consideration of the little effort enclosed. If considered worthy of purchase, whatever fee you feel adequate will be most gratefully received.

The "unctuous" style :

- (97) Such a world-renowned organisation as yours must be pressed to avail yourselves of the services of the most highly-paid artists, who are proud to execute work for you.

The "too friendly" style :

- (98) All we ask is for fair play. If you don't like the designs we submit, ring us up and tell us to call and clear them out of your way.

The "fulsome" style :

- (99) We should be intensely proud if we were able to state that our designs were considered worthy to be used to follow the beautiful work you have published

in the past. Yours is indeed a name to conjure with.
The "patronising" style :

- (100) While we do not as a rule have any time to spare for non-commissioned work, we should be prepared, in the special circumstances, to execute two or three rough pencil sketches for your consideration.

The pompous style we have already considered. Incidentally, there is a stupid mistake in example (97). The term *organisation* used calls for the pronoun *itself*, and not *yourselves*.

An Insult to the Intelligence

This chapter may be usefully rounded off by a reference to the type of letter which seems to treat the recipient as a complete nit-wit. Not long ago I received a "sales" letter in which this sentence occurred :

- (101) As I sit back in my chair, holding your letter in my hand, I am trying to picture you by your fireside. Very nice of the writer I am sure, but hardly convincing in view of the fact that the letter was most palpably duplicated, and not even individually typed.

INEXPENSIVE BOOKS FOR STUDY

COBBETT'S EASY GRAMMAR. By Wm. Cobbett.

CORRECT PUNCTUATION & EFFECTIVE SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION. By Max Crombie.

HOW TO SPELL CORRECTLY. By Professor Duncan.

HOW TO TALK CORRECTLY. By Professor Duncan.

HOW TO WRITE CORRECTLY. By Professor Duncan.

CORRECT ENGLISH. By S. C. Johnson, M.A., D.Sc.

These cloth bound books can be obtained direct from the Publishers, W. FOULSHAM & CO., LTD., 20 & 21 Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4; or they may be purchased through any Bookseller in the world.

CHAPTER THREE

Principles of Business Correspondence

BROADLY speaking, the functions of a business letter may be said to be (1) to ask for or to convey information; (2) to make or to accept an offer. In addition, there are what we may term "lest you forget" letters, with no real purpose except to remind the recipient of the sender's existence. But even these "lest you forget" letters can usually be given some specific purpose. For example, I may have met a man some time ago with whom I hope to do business. Nothing has transpired, and I just want to make sure he will not forget me. Example (102) below is a brief note which I might send him, and this would certainly serve my purpose of reminding him of my existence. It would be very much better, however, if I sent him a more specific note, as example (103).

(102) Dear Mr. Blank,

I just want to make sure you won't forget me, if there is anything you want in my line, which you may remember is Leather Goods.

I hope you are keeping busy.

Yours very truly,

(103) ~~Dear Mr. Blank,~~

Just now we are doing very well with a new Leather Case which we have produced especially for Salesmen.

It is quite a novel idea, a great improvement on the usual type of attaché case, and should be just right for your men.

Would you like me to send you one to see?

Yours very truly,

The first requirement of a good business letter is that it should be clear. The second requirement is that it should be as concise as is consistent with perfect clarity. Other requirements are as follows.

Origin should be Obvious

Its exact origin should be plain. So far as a firm is concerned, this requirement is usually satisfied by the business letterhead used, but where there are a number of branches or even a number of departments, it should be perfectly clear at a glance from which branch or department the letter has emanated. This is particularly important when the letter may give rise to a telephone call.

The letter should be clearly and accurately dated. That goes without saying. In inter-departmental correspondence it is sometimes desirable to time as well as to date a letter.

Correctly and Fully Addressed

Every letter should be correctly and fully addressed. This not only applies to the envelopes, but also to the superscription of the letter itself. Letters which are addressed simply to firms or to Limited Companies may have to travel around the departments before they reach the person for whom they are really intended. Wherever possible it is excellent practice to follow the name and address of the firm to whom the letter is addressed with some such line as *For the attention of Mr. Blank*. Where a letter is the original one of a series, i.e., it is not in answer to a letter received, this phrase cannot well be bettered, provided, of course, that the name of the person concerned is known. Where the person is not known, it is possible to compromise with a title, in this way: *For the attention of the Managing Director*—or the *Secretary*, the *Chief Accountant*, the *Works Manager*, as the case may be. Where a letter is in reply to one received, however, the inscription on the top can read *In reply to Mr. Blank's letter of August 3rd, 1937*. Then the letter can plunge directly into the subject without preamble, and thus save everybody's time. Compare these two examples:

(104) For the attention of Mr. Dash.

Dear Mr. Dash,

We beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter to hand this morning, for which we thank you. In regard to the Hand Drills, these we are pleased to say were despatched yesterday at midday, by Green Arrow.

(105) In reply to Mr. Dash's letter of September 16th.

Dear Mr. Dash,

The Hand Drills left here yesterday midday by Green Arrow.

Some firms are careful to put on their business letter headings a statement to the effect that all correspondence should be addressed to the firm, and not to individuals. This is excellent practice so far as the envelope and the superscription on the letter are concerned, but it does not debar the writer from using the devices referred to above for seeing that his letter reaches the individual whom it concerns. Wherever possible, the address on the envelope should include the department, as this facilitates sorting the post. Some firms also put "*For the attention of Mr. Blank*" on the envelope, as well as on the letter.

Correspondence Should "Connect Up"

A letter which is not the first of a series should always connect up with previous correspondence. One way of doing this has already been dealt with, but sometimes there is a break or lapse in the correspondence, and it is necessary to refresh the recipient's memory. Great care in these circumstances should be taken to make the new letter link up quite clearly and unmistakably with the previous correspondence. This is particularly important where several quite different matters are the subjects of separate sets of correspondence passing between two firms simultaneously. Quite a lot of trouble can be caused by a letter being linked up with the wrong set of previous correspondence.

The majority of business letters do not carry any reference number, but rely upon the date and the writer's name for the connecting link. Where reference numbers are given, these should always be quoted.

Repeating Essential Information

Even in the best business firms letters sometimes go astray, and where matters of importance are dealt with it is an excellent plan to repeat essential information. Here is an example :

(106) Dear Sirs,

We thank you for your letter to hand ordering 50,000 copies of the Radio Broadside printed in three colours for £215, delivery to be made in four weeks from now.

Even if previous correspondence is mislaid, this letter alone tells what was ordered, at what time, at what price, and on what conditions as regards delivery. It is not advocated that every letter should repeat all essential information, but where any letter is likely to be the king pin of the correspondence, it is well for that letter to embody all essential information, even though this means some small repetition.

Clean and Clear Typing

The letter should be legibly typed. Two or three mistakes in a letter give the impression of a careless firm with slipshod employees. Any important business letter should be absolutely free from typing mistakes. Where a letter runs to two or more pages the sheets should be firmly fastened together and numbered. Unless some very good reason to the contrary exists, all business letters should be typed on paper of the standard Large Post 4^{to} size, 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, for convenience in filing.

Enclosures

Any enclosures should be specified. If they are not referred to specifically in the body of the letter a note should be added at the foot, in this manner :

(107) Enclos :

Brochure C2

Order Form B.

To save time, it is a perfectly simple matter to work out a code, and the example just given could be abbreviated, so :

(108) Enclos : C2 : OFB

It is the usual practice for other than confidential correspondence to be left unsealed until just before post time, in case another letter is written to the same firm, possibly by a different department. It should be the duty of a responsible Post Clerk to check all letters for enclosures before sealing.

One Subject—One Letter

Perhaps the soundest plan which can be introduced in business correspondence is that of dealing with one subject only in any letter—"One subject, one memo."

Where two, three or four subjects are dealt with in one letter, the recipients may wish to send it in as many different directions at once, and that is clearly impossible. If "extracts" are made from the letter, the possibility of error is increased. The letter goes the rounds, and it may be days before it reaches the last department which has an interest in it—if it ever does. Not only to the recipients but to the senders too the principle of "one subject, one memo." is a great aid to efficiency, facilitating filing and the operation of "Watch" and "Bring Forward" systems. It means more stationery used, but that is amply justified.

Getting the Reply Direct

It should be perfectly clear to whom any answer is to be addressed. It is an excellent plan to type the signator's name underneath the signature, because although we may regard our signature as beautifully legible, it may not prove so to the recipient.

Suggesting Specific Action

The letter should leave absolutely no doubt whatever in the mind of the recipient as to what action is desired. Compare these two examples of concluding paragraphs:

- (109) We think you will agree that in these days of strenuous competition it behoves every firm to do its utmost to facilitate the work of its representatives and to provide them with up-to-date equipment.

Yours faithfully,
Leatherware, Ltd.

- (110) Every minute saved in the salesman's day is a minute of selling time gained. Our Fitted Sample Cases save at least one hour in the average day.

May we send you a typical Fitted Sample Case for you to examine at your leisure. The enclosed reply paid post card makes it a perfectly simple matter for you to say "Yes."

Yours faithfully,
Leatherware, Ltd.
(Signed) James Cox
Sales Manager.

Admittedly, example (110) is longer than (109), but it is positive in its suggestion of action.

Courtesy Letters

From time to time it is necessary to write a purely courtesy letter—that is, the letter we have received does not call for a specific answer, or it will be automatically answered by means of separate action (for example, by the execution of an order), but we may feel that courtesy demands a reply. These purely courtesy letters should be cut down to an absolute minimum, because they consume time and money of both sender and recipient, and clog the mails. *See also page 27.*

"Bring Forward" System

As the concluding principle of business correspondence we may refer to a "Bring Forward" system. Persons addressed by correspondence are not always punctilious in dealing with that correspondence, and some method must be adopted to see that replies are duly received to important communications. Some businesses make a practice of filing all correspondence from day to day, so that only the very latest letters are moving about the office. Other concerns find it best to keep all correspondence relating to a given subject, either simply fastened by a paper fastener or in a file, so that when the latest dictated letter comes up for signature the dictator has before him with the carbon copy the whole of the previous correspondence.

The second system certainly facilitates the operation of a "B.F." file. To the mass of correspondence is fixed a slip

printed on brightly coloured paper with the words *Bring Forward*. On this slip is written the date on which the correspondence is to be "brought forward" by the Secretary for attention. For example, when signing a letter it is felt reasonable to expect a reply within seven days. The slip is therefore marked with a date seven days ahead, and the whole correspondence placed in the "out" box. It is the responsibility of the Secretary to see that correspondence marked in this way is duly brought forward on the proper date. This is a very simple system and one which operates quite efficiently. If a reply is received sooner than the date marked on the "B.F." slip, it is a perfectly simple matter to lift the correspondence from the "B.F." file and pass it, with the letter now received, to the responsible executive.

Part of the training of an efficient Secretary is not just to place important incoming letters before the executive, but to attach to each one all relevant previous correspondence. This avoids much delay in dictating replies. This system of attaching previous correspondence does not apply to unimportant letters. Not quite the same as a "B.F." system is a "Watch" system. Correspondence in the "B.F." file is put back for attention in anything from three to thirty days' time, but "Watch" papers should be gone through religiously every day. Don't have a "Watch" file and forget to watch it, so that it becomes a Home of Rest for Aged Correspondence. Bulging "Watch" and "Bring Forward" files are not signs of efficiency—on the contrary. The efficient business man keeps things moving and does not allow them to become dormant or moribund.

Systems Based on Carbon Copies

Simple but adequate system of "watching" correspondence can be based on interchange of carbon copies.

Some concerns get along very well with only white carbon copy paper, while others find it an aid to efficiency to use white and one or more colours. For example, each department could have its own distinctive colour of carbon copy paper. This would certainly facilitate sorting and filing. Special colours can be allotted to individuals, as distinct from departments. Many systems, of varying degrees of intricacy, may be based upon a plan of taking several copies

of each letter on different shades of copy paper. In a typical business house, for example, the white copy could go straight to the central filing system, the pink copy to the dictator of the letter for his own personal reference and use, the yellow copy to the factory, and so on. Even where such a system does not apply, it is often a good plan to take one extra carbon copy of every letter on a tinted paper. If it is not wanted it can be promptly destroyed; but very often it is found that the existence of this extra copy facilitates inter-departmental correspondence, and often saves the writing of long letters, repeating information already recorded.

In the writer's own business every letter he dictates is typed with a white carbon copy and a blue carbon copy. The white copy is used for central filing, and the blue copy goes to the General Manager. This keeps him automatically informed of everything done by the Managing Director, in whose absence he is able to control things efficiently. Many Managing Directors very properly insist that a carbon copy of every letter written by any member of the staff shall pass over their desk. This again provides an automatic and foolproof method of the Managing Director keeping himself posted with all that is happening, and provides an opportunity of asking subordinates for an explanation when something is done, the purpose of which is not clear. Every carbon copy passing over the Managing Director's desk in this manner should be initialled by him as a sign he has seen it. This protects the subordinate against a later accusation of "You did this without my knowledge." In very large concerns, departmental managers take over this initialling of correspondence from the Managing Director, or a junior director is deputed.

Where two, three, or four carbon copies of every letter are taken, stationery can be purchased ready made into sets, so that the typist has only to insert carbon between the appropriate sheets. This system is particularly valuable where carbon copies are taken on different shades of paper, because it saves the typist's time and obviates the necessity of her being surrounded by piles of different coloured papers.

CHAPTER FOUR

How to Plan and Construct Good Letters

BEFORE you sit down to write a letter, make sure you have a letter to write. By this is meant that in business to-day many letters are written quite unnecessarily; when the information they contain could be much more efficiently conveyed, and at less cost, by a simple printed form or post card. For example, a letter is received asking for a certain piece of work to be put in hand. The only object of replying is in order to let the sender know that his instructions have been received, and have not gone astray, as he may fear if he does not hear anything for a week or two. This is a perfect instance of where a courtesy post card, with blank spaces simply filled in on the typewriter, will take the place of a letter, and save everybody's time. In exactly the same way, printed forms or post cards and the cheap postage rate can be used to advise the despatch of goods. In some businesses which have come under my notice, up to 40 per cent. of the correspondence could have been better dealt with by means of printed forms.

To the old question "How long should a letter be?" the only answer which can be returned is "Long enough to say what you have to say, and not a word longer." This particularly applies to Sales Letters (see Chapter Ten).

The Framework of a Letter

The framework of a letter will naturally depend on its nature, subject, etc. For a very large number of business letters a simple three-paragraph plan can be adopted. These three paragraphs are:

- (1) Link up;
- (2) Say what you have to say;
- (3) Invite action.

The "link up" with previous correspondence or earlier transaction has been dealt with in the preceding chapter. Almost always there is something to recall to the recipient's mind in order to prepare him for what follows. The second paragraph obviously embodies the meat of the letter. Nearly always we want some action to be taken on our letter, and the final paragraph leaves absolutely no doubt in the recipient's mind as to what we wish this action to be.

Here is an example of a letter written on this simple three-paragraph plan :

(111) Dear Sirs,

On July 23rd you expressed interest in our Wood Veneer Papers, but we had to tell you that difficulty in obtaining raw materials made it impossible to promise deliveries.

These difficulties have been overcome, and we are now able to give immediate delivery of all the numbers in the range except 37, 54 and 81X. Prices remain unaltered.

Would you like us to send you sample sheets?

Yours faithfully,

Novelty Papers, Ltd.

This is a very short letter, but exactly the same principle can be applied to subject matter calling for lengthier treatment. The only difference is that at some stage the long paragraphs are subdivided into shorter paragraphs, so that the original three paragraphs become four, five, six or more.

A useful framework on which to base sales letters is represented by the familiar four key words—Attention: Interest: Desire: Action. Think of the opera AIDA.

Keeping Letters Short

Do not be afraid of keeping your letters short. The ultra-short letter gets action because the recipient does not have to read it two or three times to find out what it is all about. The three-line letter gets dealt with at once, while the three-page letter is inevitably put on one side until a quiet hour arrives in which it can be studied, which may be never. Quite a lot of thought can be given to this matter of keeping letters short. It is a good plan to use

"accessories" to keep letters brief. If it is found in correspondence that the same thing has to be said over and over again, consider whether these points cannot be put into simple printed leaflet form, which can be enclosed with the letter. Let us assume that we are selling Home Refrigerators, and in use little difficulties crop up. Constantly in correspondence we are telling people what to do to put these little things right. At once it should be somebody's job to deal with the points in Question and Answer form, and to produce a small leaflet. Then this sort of letter could be used :

(112) Dear Madam,

We are sorry to learn from your letter, for which we thank you, that you are having some little trouble with your Paladin Refrigerator.

You will find the points you raise fully dealt with in the attached leaflet, under Questions 9 and 14.

We believe your Refrigerator will now function perfectly. If not, please do not hesitate to write to us again.

Yours very truly,
Paladin Patents, Ltd.

This example will suggest at once how sales literature can be used to keep letters brief. Reprints of articles from trade journals, pulls of press advertisements, diagrams, photographs, blue prints, charts, etc., may be used in this way.

Sometimes it is necessary to write a long letter, and it is feared that the very length of the letter will have a depressing effect upon the recipient. Quite a good plan to adopt here is to write a short letter, and the matter which is omitted is put in separate typewritten form as Appendices to the letter. Below is an example of a letter kept brief by the use of such appendices.

(113) Dear Sirs,

We have gone very carefully into the question of advertising successfully your Headache Pastilles, and the report which accompanies this letter represents the substance of our discoveries.

In Appendix "A" are summarised the expenditures in advertising of the leading 10 lines in this field, for the past 12 months.

Appendix "B" is an analysis showing the class of media used, size of space, etc.

Appendix "C" gives in outline our recommendations to you for a test campaign to spend £1,000 in two months.

We would much prefer to fill in the details at an interview, and the writer proposes to give himself the pleasure of calling upon you at 11 o'clock on Wednesday next, the 18th, if this is convenient to you.

Yours very truly,
Alpha-Omega Advertising Agency, Ltd.

Making the Long Letter Interesting

The long letter is naturally more of a problem than the short letter, and the difficulty is to make it sufficiently interesting to get it read from beginning to end, and not merely scanned. Recourse may be had to certain devices. These include :

- (1) Indenting certain paragraphs ;
- (2) Typing selected paragraphs or sentences in a different colour ;
- (3) Introducing marginal sketches ;
- (4) Introducing two or three lines of dialogue ;
- (5) Tabulating information (as is being done here) ;
- (6) Introducing diagrams (especially valuable when dealing with engineering subjects) ;
- (7) Writing in the margin a remark by hand.

Not all of these devices may be used for ordinary correspondence; some are suitable only for sales letters reproduced by a mechanical process. The value of tabulating information for speedy reference deserves a special word of emphasis. But nothing can displace vivid writing as the prime factor in getting a long letter read to the last line.

The "Idea Card" Plan

When a long and important letter has to be written the "Idea Card" plan should be adopted. Take some 5 x 3 index cards, and cut these into pieces 3 ins. by 1 in. On each card write one point which will require to be dealt with in the letter. When all your ideas are thus recorded, it is a simple matter to sort the slips into their correct and logical order. This ease of sifting, sorting and arranging is the great advantage which the "Idea Card" plan has over the ordinary method of making odd notes on a sheet of paper. It may be interesting to record that the whole of this book is being written and dictated on the "Idea Card" plan here advocated. Some hundreds of cards have been used, and before the first paragraph of the first chapter was dictated, it was known exactly what the last paragraph of the last chapter would deal with.

Writing the Middle First

Another useful plan in letter-writing is to write it "inside out." By this is meant that one does not bother to puzzle out a way of starting the letter in an interesting manner, but plunges straight into the subject matter. This is written, rewritten and possibly written again, until it is absolutely satisfactory. If this is done, it is found comparatively simple to add to it the right kind of opening and concluding paragraphs and the letter is complete. It is the "meat" of the letter which matters. Get this right, and the beginning and the end will fall naturally into place. Sometimes it is found that no additional opening paragraph is wanted at all!

Letters of Complaint

Letters dealing with complaints are not easy to write, and care must be taken not to offend the complaining correspondent still further. The writer should be sincerely thanked for making the complaint, which provides the essential opportunity of making adjustment. Here are two examples, the first of the wrong way to deal with a complaint, and the second of the right way.

- (114) We are exceedingly surprised to receive your letter complaining that the Combined Gas Range we supplied does not work properly, and we cannot understand this, as we have supplied hundreds of these Gas Ranges and they are thought very well of in the trade. We think there must be some mistake. Perhaps you are not using it correctly and we enclose an Instruction Card in case you have lost the one supplied with the Range. Please let us know if the Range is now all right.

Compare this tactful handling of the same complaint :

- (115) We are extremely sorry to learn that the Combined Gas Range we supplied for your new house is failing to give you the complete satisfaction you had every right to expect.

We are greatly obliged to you for bringing the matter to our notice. It is possible that the Range has not been quite correctly fitted and adjusted, a point on which we are anxious to satisfy ourselves.

Would you have any objections if we asked Mr. Walters, of your town, to visit you and inspect the Range? This will be less expensive to us than sending a fitter down specially, and quite as satisfactory, because Mr. Walters has an expert knowledge of our Ranges.

It will be noticed that this letter (not given in its entirety here) is written in rather an expansive style. This is deliberate. Psychologically, it is unsound to give the complainant the impression that his or her complaint has been hastily answered or summarily disposed of. The somewhat discursive style carries a subtle suggestion that the complaint is being taken very seriously. In example (114) above, a quite unwarrantable attempt is made to push the responsibility back on to the person making the complaint.

Using "Stock" Paragraphs

The Correspondence Departments of some firms find it possible to make use of stock paragraphs. The problem here is one already touched upon in this chapter—that of dealing with the aspects of the business which crop up

repeatedly. Whenever a paragraph is written or dictated which gives especial satisfaction because of the concise and clear way in which it deals with a certain point, the paragraph should be copied out and pasted in a book and given a number. An exact duplicate of this book should be in the hands of the stenographer. Then, when the same point comes up for treatment at a later time, the dictator refers to his book of stock paragraphs, and simply says: "Take in paragraph 29" or whatever it is.

Here is an example of a stock paragraph:

- (116) We note that your order is marked "less $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent." If you will be good enough to refer again to our list, page 28, you will see that it is expressly stated that discount of $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. is for minimum orders of £10 value. The most generous discount we can allow on your present order is 25 per cent. with $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. extra cash discount for settlement within 7 days, and we trust this will be acceptable to you.

Another time when a stock paragraph can be usefully employed is when a certain change is to take place. For example, a firm plans to move to a new and larger factory on a certain date. This will necessarily mean a certain amount of disorganisation, and it is desired to warn all customers well in advance, so that they may anticipate their requirements. The procedure would be to draft a stock paragraph dealing with this move, and to have this paragraph inserted in all letters sent out for, say, a month prior to the date of the change. Needless to say, care would have to be taken to see that the paragraph was not sent over and over again to the same firm. Another matter which might be dealt with in the same way is the forthcoming issue of an expensive catalogue.

Very little has been said in this chapter about form or sales letters, for the sufficient reason that these are the subject of later chapters (Nine and Ten).

Twelve Test Questions

Here, to conclude, are twelve test questions which can be applied to a letter to discover its degree of merit.

- (1) Does it bear the correct superscription ?
- (2) Is it correctly dated ?
- (3) Is it free from errors in spelling and typing ?
- (4) Is it well paragraphed ?
- (5) Is it correctly finished off for signature ?
- (6) Does it " connect " in the first paragraph ?
- (7) Has it " personality " ?
- (8) Is it positively phrased ?
- (9) Can anything in it be misunderstood ?
- (10) Is it free from over-friendliness ?
- (11) Could it be briefer with advantage ?
- (12) Does it suggest action ?

CHAPTER FIVE

How to Dictate Good Letters

It might be as well to begin with a few remarks on how not to dictate. Many articles have been written, and many more will doubtless be written, on the pitiful way in which some business men dictate letters. The fact is that not one business man in ten can dictate concise, grammatical English. The other nine owe more than they suspect to their secretaries and typists. Journalists often say that the greatest disservice they can do a politician is to report his speeches verbatim. In the same way, many a secretary could not have a grimmer revenge on her employer than to type his letters exactly as he dictated them.

Patience Essential

The trouble with the inefficient dictator is that he is too impatient, or has too great an idea of his own ability and importance, to prepare for dictation. His method is to snatch up a letter and to start dictating at once. Hardly has he dictated a few words than he finds that he has not read the letter properly, and has to pause to do so. He then begins once more to dictate, only to find that certain essential information is missing. Another pause while he speaks on the house telephone, or worse still shouts at the top of his voice for a certain person to wait upon him. Another attempt to dictate; then it is found that some essential piece of a previous correspondence must be sought and found. And so it goes on, about two minutes out of every ten given to dictation, the other eight being spent in conversation and by-play.

Pre-Dictation Preparation

It isn't clever or the sign of a big business man to attempt to dictate letters "off-hand." Before the stenographer is

called in, each letter should be carefully studied, notes made upon it and everything relevant brought together. Before a single word is dictated, the dictator should know precisely and exactly what he is going to say. Then we should have far less of "Strike that out, Miss Blank, and start again."

Every business man should appreciate the difference between a stenographer and a private secretary. The first is a shorthand-typist, and her duty is to type cleanly and efficiently exactly what is said to her. A private secretary, on the other hand, is there to help with correspondence, and many a business man would be better served if he would indicate to a competent typist-secretary what he wished to say in answer to any particular letter, and leave it to her to put those observations into correct and concise English. The sign of a bad dictator is that he will rattle off two or three hundred words in answer to a letter, when his secretary could deal with it much more efficiently in about four lines. The long-winded dictator should be made to type his own letters for a fortnight. That would teach him the art of compression.

The essence of good dictation is clear thinking. Again, never start to dictate until you know exactly what you want to say. Make your notes beforehand; get any essential information beforehand; have all previous correspondence before you. Some business men do not seem to be able to dictate their morning's letters without gathering half the staff around them—another sign of inefficiency.

Dictate letters early in the day. Every letter should be opened and read before ten o'clock. Some of the time at least from ten o'clock to eleven o'clock can be devoted to preparation for dictation, and the actual dictating done between eleven o'clock and twelve o'clock. No man can expect efficiency from his workers if he does not dictate his day's letters before four o'clock in the afternoon.

There is no golden road to fluency in dictation. It comes only with practice, not only in speaking, but in writing as well.

Using a Dictating Machine

I have for many years in my own business practice used a Dictaphone, and in addition to letters have dictated over a

million words in form of articles, textbooks, etc. It is very difficult for me to write in restrained terms of the usefulness of this modern invention. In my view, it really does merit the overworked word "indispensable."

Not everyone can use a Dictaphone; but quite a number of persons who maintain that they cannot, could if only they would use some common sense and exercise a little patience. Some business men solemnly assert that they can only dictate if they are pacing up and down. Nonsense! What would one say to an accountant who maintained that he could only add up the columns of figures with accuracy if he carried his ledger and shuffled up and down.

The secret of using a Dictaphone is the pre-dictating preparation already referred to. That and clear thinking.

Remember from the beginning that a Dictaphone is a mechanical instrument, and one capable of quite a delicate adjustment. The machine used for dictation and that used for transcribing must be carefully synchronised for speed, otherwise the most untoward results will occur. For example, if the transcriber's machine is working at a faster rate than the dictator's machine, this will have the effect of greatly speeding up the apparent rate of dictation, and what was dictated at a normal speed will come through the transcriber's earpieces as an incomprehensible gabble. There is nothing wrong with the recording, and immediately the transcribing machine is adjusted for speed the dictated matter comes out perfectly.

How to Dictate

Enunciate clearly; speak slowly. Spell any difficult or technical words. Write any unusual words or names on a slip of paper and put in the box with the cylinder. Matter requiring great care in phrasing should be written out beforehand, and read at the appropriate place in the dictation itself. Punctuation signs, capital letters, new paragraphs, etc., should be dictated. Below is a literal transcription of a short letter exactly as given to the Dictaphone. It will be appreciated that with a little experience the transcriber can separate instructions to herself from what has to be typed, especially if her name is used, as in the example which follows:

Indicating Length of Letter

Various devices have been invented from time to time to record the length of mechanically dictated letters, but I have not yet found a better method than marking on the actual letter itself or on a slip of paper, the number of spaces on the Dictaphone cylinder which the letter has occupied. For those who are not familiar with the Dictaphone, it must be explained that the length of the cylinder is divided into fifty-five spaces, which are clearly indicated on a metal scale. A pointer travels along this scale as dictation proceeds, so that the dictator knows exactly how many spaces have been devoted to a given letter. For example, seven letters may be on a single cylinder, respectively occupying spaces as follows: 0 to 9; 9 to 14; 14 to 27; 27 to 35; 35 to 44; 44 to 49; and 49 to the end. The manner of marking the letter answered is very simple. First the number of the cylinder is written and encircled. Underneath this is written the number of spaces, e.g., 29-44. It is thus possible for the typist to pick out any particular letter for preferential transcribing, simply by referring to the cylinder number and the appropriate spaces.

This marking of the letter serves the further purpose of showing the typist the length of the letter, so that she knows how to display it on the letterhead. For example, if the spaces are given as 17-19, she knows that this must be a very short letter and deals with it accordingly. This obviates the unsightliness of a very short letter being typed right up at the top of the sheet, with a sea of white space below it. When the cylinders are sent out for transcribing, it is a very simple matter for the dictator to put in each cylinder box a strip of paper bearing the cylinder number. Then the typist does not have to wonder which of six cylinders is No. 1, which No. 2, and so on. The experienced dictator keeps by him some specially cut strips of paper, about 6 ins. long by 1 in. wide, for this purpose of cylinder identification.

Where the letter dictated is originating a new series of correspondence, and is not in reply to a letter received, it is necessary to take a piece of scrap paper and write out a simple chit bearing the name of the firm, the cylinder number,

etc. As the letters received are answered, and these new chits are written out, they should be kept together in a large bulldog clip. When the last letter has been dictated, the cylinders, the letters and the chits are all ready to hand out. In the clip, the last letter dictated is naturally on the top, but it is only a few moments' work for the typist to reverse the order before she begins transcribing.

Planning the Dictation

If the Dictation has been properly planned, the most urgent letters are dictated first, so that if the transcribing is done in the same order, there is no danger of unimportant letters being given precedence over important ones. As the typist proceeds, the letters she takes from the cylinders become less and less urgent. It sometimes happens, of course, that an urgent letter has to be dictated late in the series, when a special mark in bright red crayon can be made on the letter or the chit, to indicate that this letter is important and should be given preferential treatment. Another method, when handing a particularly large batch of letters to the typist for transcription, is to mark the less important ones with the initials "N.U." which signify that these letters are "Not Urgent," and, if absolutely necessary, may be left to the following day.

Needless to say, the transcriber needs to study the idiosyncrasies of the dictator, and it is quite a good idea, when the Dictaphone system is first adopted, for the stenographer to be present while the first two or three mornings' dictation is being given to the Dictaphone, so that a proper and mutually satisfactory system can be evolved; and, what is much more important, a mutually understood system.

Wherever possible every letter dictated should be read and signed by the dictator. When it is necessary for the dictator to leave the office before the letter is transcribed, it is a good plan to use, in addition to the usual rubber stamp signature, a separate little rubber stamp which reads: "Dictated by Mr. Blank and signed in his absence." The advantage of this method is that should error be made in the transcription, the way is clear for a correction to be sent by the next post. Some firms use a slightly different form of

words where a rubber-stamped signature has to be used—"Dictated but not read." The idea is exactly the same—to provide a graceful way out if an error has crept into the transcription.

Putting Personality into Letters

A letter is always a very personal thing, and sometimes the greater the degree in which the personality of the writer is conveyed, the greater the success the letter will meet. This is particularly true of letters sent out in identical form to a large number of recipients, but it also applies to normal business correspondence.

There are two principal ways of personalising a letter : (1) by presentation and (2) by phraseology.

Various circumstances will make the personal note in correspondence desirable. Let us assume that a well-known commercial artist, Bertram Blank, has started his own Studio, employing a number of other artists. Every advertising manager who sends a job to that Studio will naturally want it to be personally overlooked by Mr. Bertram Blank. It is therefore desirable that Mr. Blank shall as far as ever possible put his own captivating and clever personality into the letters emanating from his Studio. Not very long ago a manufacturer of Radio Receiving Sets capitalised his own personality with remarkable success in his advertising. Clearly, this same personality which shone from the advertisements should have been reflected in such sales correspondence as came from the firm in response to enquiries, as doubtless it did.

In brief, all letters should to some extent reflect the personality of the writer. Impersonal letters are dull, colourless and lifeless things.

The letter which subtly conveys the personality of the writer goes a great way towards creating confidence. To return to the example of a mail order business—somehow one feels a greater confidence in buying furniture from a Mr. Thomas Chippendale than from The North & South Furniture Emporium, Ltd. If Mr. Thomas Chippendale succeeds in putting his personality into the letters he writes, we are much more likely to be convinced by his talk of selected materials, expert craftsmanship, etc. The success

enjoyed by a certain Furniture Emporium unquestioningly owes a great deal to a famous series of advertisements in which Mr. & Mrs. Everyman figured in personal conversation with the head of the business. The point to grasp is that businesses are often little more than *names*, whereas we like to deal with *persons*.

Large mail order houses conducting thousands of transactions every week naturally receive a number of complaints. One firm made a particular point of putting a photograph of the Complaints Manager on the letterhead used by this Department. Their point was that disgruntled customers were apt to assume that the Complaints Manager, like the famous Mrs. Harris, had no real existence. By showing his picture they overcame this disbelief, and convinced the customer that his or her complaint was actually being dealt with by a living individual, whose particular job it was to see that a satisfactory adjustment was made. This matter of personality in business is a fascinating one, with a direct bearing on our subject. Sometimes it is possible to capitalise a personality apart from any individual associated with a business. Not infrequently the trade mark can be "animated" to provide this essential personality. In this regard, recall the Kodak Girl, Sunny Jim of Force, Johnny Walker, etc.

As pointed out earlier, it is sometimes desirable to capitalise the personality of the principal of the business. Without harping unduly on the matter of complaints, imagine what different effect it has on my mind if, when I address a letter of mild expostulation to a firm who have in some way let me down, I receive, not the usual form of acknowledgement and promise of redress on the firm's ordinary paper, but a letter on a very neat and dignified heading, which has at the top the magic words "From the Office of the Managing Director."

Wise Use of First Person Singular

Strictly, letters emanating from a firm, limited company, association or other organisation should be written in the first person plural. But "I" often has a directness which is lacking from "we." The singular number is particularly valuable when the person using it is the head of a business

which is, as it were, the personification of his individual talents. Compare these two examples :

(119) Dear Sirs,

We thank you for your letter to hand, from which we learn you wish us to design two stands for you at the forthcoming World Peace Exhibition.

We have been appointed Official Stand Contractors to the Exhibition, which will facilitate the execution of your esteemed instructions.

We note that you are not yet in a position to let us know the number of the stands, or whether they will be adjacent, opposite each other, or in different aisles.

It will not be possible for us to prepare even rough designs pending the receipt of this essential information, which we therefore await.

Yours very truly,

Johnson Displays, Ltd.

James Johnson

Managing Director.

Here is a similar letter, written in an informal blend of the first person singular and plural, and capitalising the personality of the sender.

(120) For the attention of Mr. B. White.

Dear Mr. White,

I am delighted to learn that my firm is to be privileged to design two stands for you at the forthcoming World Peace Exhibition. I congratulate you on your enterprise.

We have been appointed Official Stand Contractors to the Exhibition, which should help a lot, as we can both design and erect. I propose to supervise this job myself, as I have some original ideas floating about in my mind which I think can be utilised with excellent effect for you. But it will be necessary for me to have exact information about the situation of your stands, before I can do any work on sketches and small scale models for you to approve.

If I can use what influence I have with the Organisers to get you any particular stands you want, please let me know.

Yours very truly,
James Johnson
Managing Director,
Johnson Displays, Ltd.

CHAPTER SIX

Punctuation, Paragraphing and Presentation

It is a fact that a very few persons can punctuate intelligently. Yet it is a very simple matter once the principles of punctuation have been grasped. The function of punctuation is to make the meaning of what is written crystal clear. Punctuation has no purpose apart from meaning, with the exception of the customary use of the full points to indicate a contraction, e.g., Ltd. for Limited.

Here are two simple examples of ambiguity due to faulty punctuation :

(121) We cannot find the drawing for the advertisement which has received your approval.

(122) I have never met John Smith son of Robert Smith who was at Rugby.

Notice how, in each of these examples, two different meanings can be given the sentences, simply by varying the punctuation.

(123) We cannot find the drawing—for the advertisement which received your approval.

(124) We cannot find the drawing (for the advertisement) which received your approval.

(125) I have never met John Smith (son of Robert Smith) who was at Rugby.

(126) I have never met John Smith—son of Robert Smith who was at Rugby.

Punctuation should never be made to carry the major burden of making sense clear. Example (126) would be very much better written :

(127) I have never met John Smith, son of the Robert Smith who was at Rugby.

Here is a paraphrase of the classic example of sense destroyed by absence of punctuation :

- (128) He walked out of the office 15 minutes after he was found dead.

Compare :

- (129) He walked out of the office : 15 minutes after, he was found dead.

Substitute *later* for *after* and the meaning becomes really clear.

Consider these :

- (130) Put more space between pen and and and and ink.

- (131) Put more space between "pen" and "and," and "and" and "ink."

- (132) The teacher said that that that that that boy wrote was wrong.

- (133) The teacher said, that that "that," that that boy wrote was wrong.

Now let us examine each of the punctuational signs in turn. Not all the examples given are from business correspondence ; but as a partial examination of the subject would be unsatisfactory, and some of the uses would not normally be found in letters, it has been thought best to give clear examples from many forms of composition, rather than attempt to force them all into the mould of business correspondence.

The Comma

Use the comma when some sign is essential to clearness but no "stronger" sign than a comma is needed.

Use the comma when a pause would be made in speaking—again for clearness.

Do not be afraid to omit the obvious comma if clearness is not sacrificed. Too many commas are even worse than too few. The following sentences would gain nothing by the use of the comma separating the clauses:

- (134) We shall be pleased to send a Catalogue and to execute your orders by post.

(135) He ordered three prints and an enlargement of one of them.

(136) You are registered as a customer and your name has been added to our mailing list.

In the following examples the comma is justified, as the second clause does not follow quite so obviously on the first, as in the examples above. There is, in fact, a slight change of mental direction, but not enough to justify the "stronger" sign, the semicolon.

(137) He opened the office door, but was stopped short by a strong odour of burning.

(138) Our new building is now opened, and Mr. Roberts has left for London.

In this example, the rule of clearness alone dictates the use of the comma :

(139) He prefers the illustration to be in line, and half-tone is only to be used if imperatively necessary.

Adjectives are usually best separated by commas, thus :

(140) "He is an industrious, intelligent, conscientious workman," he replied.

Note that no comma is wanted after *conscientious*. Adjectives joined by a conjunction do not need the comma, thus :

(141) The copy is bright, informative, authoritative and exactly what is wanted.

Adjectives sometimes go in pairs which need no separation. *Stupid little fool* and *miserable old man* are cases in point. Prefatory or relating clauses or words at the beginning of sentences require the comma, thus :

(142) Clearly, he is in no position to guarantee anything.

(143) Rightly or wrongly, he is going.

The comma is useful in separating the parts of an inverted sentence :

(144) Costing £15,000, our new plant is the most expensive ever laid down.

A comma is useful, though not absolutely necessary, after an introductory saving clause :

(145) If he does not pay, the goods must be sold.

(146) Provided your entry form reaches us before the last post on Saturday, you are eligible.

For the internal parenthetical clause, two commas are essential. The safe rule is "both or neither."

(147) This book, heavy and clumsy as it is, should go with you.

(148) The dog, with its mysterious owner, has disappeared.

(149) We are returning the ink, which is most unsatisfactory, to you to-night.

Note how the sense of (149) can be completely altered by the omission of either or both of the commas. The sentence as it is constructed can be given three distinct meanings. Here is another example of a sentence, the sense of which is obscured if not destroyed by the omission of a comma. First, without the comma; then with it:

(150) The agent who "boosts" gas works for the B.C.G.A., and not for individual gas companies.

(151) The agent who "boosts" gas, works for the B.C.G.A., and not for individual gas companies.

The items of a compound subject are best separated by commas:

(152) The ink, the paper, the settings and the blocks have been ready for days.

(153) The swagger, the arrogance, the insolence, the vulgarity of his manner are unbearable.

The Semicolon

In "strength," the semicolon comes between the comma and the colon. Broadly speaking, the semicolon's principal use is to separate a part of a sentence which could stand by itself, but which is so closely related as to make separation inadvisable, from either the standpoint of clearness or ease of style. A succession of short, staccato sentences is wearisome. To begin with, here are three examples of the semicolon wrongly used:

(154) He wrote a letter; demanding the return of his deposit.

(155) The six colours are these ; red, green, purple, orange, blue and grey.

(156) The king is dead ; murdered, I am told.

In (154) a comma would suffice ; in (155) a colon would be better ; while in (156) the shock of the final statement justifies the use of the dash. Here are three examples of the semicolon used effectively :

(157) To-day we have drastically marked down our stock ; to-morrow the Sale commences.

(158) The job is causing us much anxiety ; it is days behind now.

(159) He expects us to cancel ; and that is our reward for doing our utmost to help him.

Tabulated matter often calls for the semicolon, thus :

(160) The four colour schemes suggested are :

- (1) Red—green—grey ;
- (2) Blue—gold—black ;
- (3) Grey—silver—cerise ;
- (4) Green—maroon—grey.

The Colon

The word “colon” means “a limb”—of a sentence in this instance. The colon is the punctuational sign which is least in favour to-day, so far as its primary use is concerned, because the compound sentence has fallen into disfavour. Usually, where the colon is used as a major sign, a period could be substituted ; and modern practice says it should be. One example will suffice :

(161) Shortly before midnight, the grossly swollen river burst its banks : in less than an hour ten thousand souls were rendered homeless.

Here making the two “limbs” into separate sentences would definitely heighten the dramatic effect.

The colon is effectively used when enumeration follows, as in example (160) above.

The colon is also useful after matter leading naturally into dialogue, so :

(162) He turned angrily from his contemplation of the shrubbery and demanded :

“ Who gave that boulder permission to come here ? ”

It will be observed that the colon is frequently used in this book to introduce the various examples.

The Full Point

The full point calls for little remark. It has two uses ; to indicate the end of a sentence, and to mark an abbreviation. Where an abbreviation comes at the end of a sentence, the one full point serves both purposes, of course. In writing the plural of words contracted to letters, it is customary to substitute the apostrophe for the second full point, as here :

(163) P.O's (postal orders).

(164) B.R.C's (Business Reply Cards).

The Dash

Lazy writers overdo the use of the dash ; it saves them the trouble of thinking out the correct punctuational sign. Similarly, nervous writers are prone to “ dash in the dashes ” because it suits their jerky style. Literally, they progress, not smoothly and easily, but by a process of quick dashes. Of all the signs, the dash requires to be used with the greatest restraint ; its abuse is an insidious blemish. The dash may be used singly or in pairs ; and two distinct significations are involved.

Used singly, the dash is useful when, in place of a comma, it separates part of a sentence in a marked manner, and thereby lends emphasis to the part separated. Here are two examples :

(165) He told me to get out of his sight—curse him !

(166) She is a widow—at least, she passes for such.

From (166) it will be seen that the dash is a useful sign to introduce an after-thought or a qualifying statement. In (167), the dash is used to “ gather together ” a number of parts into a collective whole, in the interests of clearness :

(167) Her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her lips, her cheeks, her nose—all these he critically examined.

This sentence could be reconstructed, still retaining the dash :

(168) Eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, nose—he passed them all under critical review.

When employed for parenthesis, obviously the dash must be used in pairs. It is a common mistake with careless writers to use only the first dash of what should be a parenthetical pair.

No rule is available to help us decide when a parenthetical clause will be more properly enclosed in brackets or between dashes. It is a matter governed very largely by personal taste and one's feeling. Words in brackets seem cut off more from the remainder of the sentence than if they were placed between dashes. Broadly speaking, the three degrees of strength in parenthetical punctuation are the comma, the dash and the bracket, in each case in pairs.

Where the dash is used singly, in a non-parenthetical sense, it is clumsy to use dashes for parenthesis in the same sentence, as here :

(169) He is going—there he goes ! stumbling down the stairs now—and he is not to return for a week—praise heaven !

Two dashes are a full complement for any sentence. Some stylists condemn parenthesis altogether, on the score that the matter so enclosed is either essential, when it should be woven into the texture of the sentence itself, instead of being an aside ; or it is not material to a clear understanding and should be omitted. A certain amount of parenthesis is in order, but over-done it is a serious blemish.

The Hyphen

To hyphen or not to hyphen ?—that is the question which so often puzzles in the office. H. W. Fowler, in *Modern English Usage*, has a long and extremely helpful article on the subject. The difficulty of deciding offhand whether two words should be quite separate or hyphenated, or whether what were originally two words have now been coalesced into one, is illustrated by the following examples, which appear consecutively in *Authors' and Printers' Dictionary*:

- (170) By and by, bye-bye, by-election, by-gone, by-lane, by-law, byname, bypath, by-play, by-plot, by-product, by-road, bystander, by-street, by the by, by-walk, by-way, byword.

Compound adjectives, nouns and other parts of speech should be hyphenated, as here :

- (171) He is a fee-snatching rascal.
 (172) He is a proper stick-in-the-mud.
 (173) What a happy-go-lucky family !
 (174) She is a dyed-in-the-wool spinster.
 (175) A stay-at-home critic . . .

Compound adjectives sometimes demand the hyphen, because the words joined, if left quite separate, could be interpreted individually, with a distortion of the sense. Fowler quotes as examples : *dark-blue*, *red-hot*, *bitter-sweet*, *mock-heroic*. Where two words are used together in a special sense which differs from that of either of the words separately, the hyphen is correctly used to join them, e.g., *blue-socking*, *red-coat*, *red-letter day*.

At times, an aimed-for effect is in part achieved by joining two adjectives with a hyphen, instead of qualifying the adjective with the usual adverb. Examples :

- (176) He came to a swift-running stream.
 (177) I hate his soft-speaking manner.

The hyphen may be used to connect whole clauses into what may be termed burlesque adjectives, as here :

- (178) He was wearing what John called his "start-at-the-bottom-of-the-ladder-my-boy" expression.
 (179) All this old-school-tie nonsense . . .

Brackets

Brackets have this advantage over dashes for parenthesis, that the dash may be misunderstood, but the bracket cannot be. Brackets, as the "strongest" form of parenthesis, should not be used when dashes, or even commas, would suffice.

In the following examples, brackets are used with justification :

- (180) This car at £210 (ex works) is amazing value.
- (181) In *Chromatic Exercises* (p. 291 *et seq.*) Kramer states . . .
- (182) The examination is divided into three parts :
- (1) Salesmanship ;
 - (2) Sales Organisation ;
 - (3) Sales Management.

No good purpose would be served by multiplying examples, as the use of brackets presents no particular problems. Two further points may be touched upon, however—brackets within brackets, and the bracket at the end of the sentence. If possible, paraphrase to avoid the use of brackets within brackets, a clumsy construction. Parenthesis within parenthesis is straining the reader's indulgence too far. Where the construction cannot be avoided, use one pair of dashes and one pair of brackets, as in the following example :

- (183) The composer's *Enchantress Suite*—first performed in Vienna (? in 1894) in his absence in Paris—reveals precisely similar romantic tendencies.

In this example, the parenthesis between dashes could quite well have been enclosed with commas.

The practice of using square brackets [] to enclose the usual curved brackets seems to be falling into disuse, and one frequently sees curved brackets within curved brackets. If both come at the end of the sentence, a deplorable piece of punctuation results, as here :

- (184) (For further details, see Marchant's *Merchant Ships* (Vol. III).)

Few amateur writers seem sure of the relative positions of the bracket and the period at the end of the sentence. Where *part* only of the sentence is in brackets, the full point goes *outside* the bracket. Where the *whole* of the sentence is in *brackets*, the full point goes inside. Examples :

- (185) I have heard from Clara (she sends her love).
- (186) (I have marked the letter "Personal" to be sure.)

The Apostrophe

The apostrophe has two uses: to mark the possessive case, and to indicate the omission of a letter or letters in a contracted word or compound of two words.

Where the number is singular, the apostrophe goes inside the *s*; where it is plural, it goes outside. Examples:

(187) Who removed the customer's drawings?

(188) Who removed the customers' drawings?

Care should be exercised with words in which the plural is indicated other than by the addition of *s* (e.g., man, men). The apostrophe then goes inside in spite of the plural number, as here:

(189) This way to the Men's Cloakroom.

(190) Stand up for women's rights.

Inanimate things take the apostrophe in the possessive case:

(191) The sun's rays . . .

(192) The bayonets' steely gleam . . .

(193) Five minutes' work . . .

Where words or names ending with *s* are in the possessive case, it is usual to-day to add a second *s* and to put the apostrophe inside it, as in (195) below:

(194) St. James' Day is July 25th.

(195) St. James's Day is July 25th.

The use of the apostrophe in the place of a missing letter or letters is sufficiently indicated by the following examples:

(196) It can't be done.

(197) It cost a ha'penny.

Where there are two omissions, at different places, it is customary to ignore the first and to mark the second only by the apostrophe, as here:

(198) You shan't go!

It's as an abbreviation for *it is*, is in order; but *its*, without the apostrophe, is correct for the possessive case of the impersonal pronoun, of course.

The Question Mark

The mark of interrogation at the end of the sentence causes little trouble, except when it occurs contiguous to one or more other signs. (This is dealt with below.) But the question mark may be quite properly used internally, as in the following examples :

(199) "Where is it?" she asked.

(200) "You have let him go? by himself? with that woman?"

(201) For what purpose does the poet wish for a thousand tongues, but to sing? for what purpose a thousand hands, but to pluck the wires? not to dip a thousand pens into a thousand ink-pots.

A. Quiller-Couch.

(202) Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? *Shakespeare.*

(203) He has promised—would you believe it?—to buy me a new hat.

Rhetorical questions take the mark, as here :

(204) Is it to be wondered that the country has lost faith in the Government?

It is possible to have a question within a question, and one's sense of fitness must guide one here. Strictly speaking, the example below is correctly punctuated, but it is a clumsy construction most writers would seek to avoid :

(205) Can you tell me the author of a book entitled "Who goes There?"?

A better treatment would be :

(206) Can you tell me the author of a book entitled *Who Goes There?*

The Exclamation Mark

The exclamation mark is a sign of emphasis, of emotion, of irony, of command, etc. Examples :

(207) And it might have been me!

(208) You!—You!—a murderer!

(209) Oh, you beauty ! You model of all the manly virtues !

(210) Five rounds rapid—fire !

(211) Send now for this Free Gift !

The exclamation mark is used when writing in the declamatory style, thus :

(212) How youth must mock us for the follies of age !

(213) Patriotism, what cruelties are committed in thy name !
what rank injustices inflicted in thy cause !

(214) My heart went thump ! thump !—missed a beat and thumped again.

The exclamation mark is sometimes substituted for the question mark, with effect :

(215) And now, if you please, I am asked—what am I going to do about it !

Inverted Commas

Apart from dialogue, examined later, inverted commas or “quotes” are used in the following circumstances.

For the names of books, songs, newspapers, musical compositions, etc. Present-day practice, however, prefers the employment of italics instead as in (217) below :

(216) The production of “The Tempest” was a failure.

(217) The production of *The Tempest* was a failure.

This certainly reduces the possibility of “quotes” within “quotes.”

For words which are quoted, because the writer has no desire to be thought guilty of the theft of a happy phrase :

(218) This is my last task to-night—“and so to bed” with an easy conscience.

Where words are current idiom, which the writer does not want to be taken as his own expression :

(219) He wants the music “jazzed up” a little.

(220) The craze for “hot music” shows no signs of abating.

(221) His “signature tune” is three blasts on the electric horn and one crash of gears.

Where a word is (or words are) loosely used, and the writer wishes as it were to apologise for the verbal approximation, as here :

(222) The "ground plan" of the book is complete.

(223) The "mechanics" of layout construction . . .

Where an expression is slang or at best a colloquialism, as here :

(224) All this talk about "de-bunking" Art and Music . . .

(225) She is known as a "hot gosseller."

For technical terms that are well understood, but which might not be thought good English :

(226) From the standpoint of "look through," the paper is excellent.

(227) The use of "quotes" in dialogue . . .

(228) Our file of "live" customers . . .

For a person's thoughts, when they are given literally :

(229) "I'm in the soup," thought Jack, "up to my neck."

Straightforward dialogue should present no punctuational difficulties. It is when inverted commas require to be used in conjunction with one or more signs that confusion may arise. Should the inverted commas precede or follow the full point? A logical rule would be to put them outside when the entire sentence was "quoted," but inside when only part was "quoted," as here :

(230) "That's all very well."

(231) It's a clear case of "the biter bit".

A similar problem arises with internal punctuation. Which of the two following examples is to be preferred?

(232) If you must use words like "grafters" and "de-bunk," at least use them correctly.

(233) If you must use words like "grafters" and "de-bunk", at least use them correctly.

Fowler, in *Modern English Usage*, declares (230) and (232) to be the more usual construction; but (231) and (233) to be more correct. The important thing is to be consistent; make your own choice and stick to it.

Here is a complicated bit of punctuation :

- (234) "Did you tell me," asked Mrs. Green, "that Dora had gone to see a film called 'What Price Glory?'?"

The use of italics for a title simplifies matters, and the merging of the two marks of interrogation is permissible (*vide* Fowler) as here :

- (235) "Did you tell me," asked Mrs. Green, "that Dora had gone to see a film called *What Price Glory?*?"

It is more usual to use double inverted commas first, and single inverted commas inside these, though the reverse would be more logical. Those who prefer to start with single "quotes" are in the good company of a number of distinguished writers.

The Hiatus

The hiatus (. . .) is an extremely useful sign, as it performs functions quite its own.

It is used to indicate that a quotation begins in the middle of a sentence :

- (236) ". . . a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy." *Shakespeare.*

Similarly, to indicate that a quotation is deliberately left incomplete ; or that only part of a sentence has been constructed to illustrate a particular point : see examples (191), (192) and (193).

Words omitted from a quotation should always be indicated by the hiatus, out of courtesy to the original author :

- (237) We that are true lovers run into strange capers ;
. . . so is all nature in love mortal in folly. *Shakespeare.*

Distinct from this use of the hiatus is its employment as an aid to expression. H. G. Wells is very fond of this device. Here is a typical passage from *Tono-Bungay*.

- (238) "Cuttin' canals," murmured my uncle. "Making tunnels. . . . New countries. . . . New centres. . . . Zzzz. . . . Finance. . . . Not only Palestine."

The hiatus as an aid to expression requires to be used with restraint. Certain authors show signs of having allowed its use to become a habit, a mere "trick of the trade."

In the passage quoted above, it will be noticed that there are four dots in each case. One, that close to the word, is the full point ; the other three comprise the hiatus. Where the hiatus comes in the middle of a sentence, indicating a pause on the part of a speaker, or a strong emotion felt by the writer, the three dots are sufficient, and a space should be left before the first and the third, as here :

(239) "You are . . . going away . . . without me?"

The hiatus can, of course, be used after a question or exclamation mark, as here :

(240) "Why not? . . . You would have left me ages ago . . ."

(241) "You traitor! . . . You know what this means?"

The Pointer

The pointer (a colon followed by a dash) is used to lead into tabulated matter or dialogue, in this manner :

(242) There are three principal sources of extra sales :—

- (1) More customers ;
- (2) More sales to existing customers ; and
- (3) Stopping sales leakages.

(243) He flung himself about and demanded :—

"What exactly are you driving at?"

Many writers to-day prefer the colon by itself, i.e., without the dash. The practice of using the dash following a semi-colon is not to be emulated ; it is indefensible.

Capital Initials

Something may usefully be said here about the typist's bugbear, the capital initial. When should a word be dignified by the use of a capital initial? The answer will be dictated partly by usage, and partly by the whims of the writer. In the following sentences initial capitals are used with justification.

- (244) This book is invaluable to Advertising Agents, Printers, Art Studios, etc.
- (245) For the courtesy of the Sales Manager's attention.
- (246) Who are the makers of "Dogberry" Sports Wear?
- (247) As usual, the Press gave the Exhibition a good send-off.
- (248) Art, Drama and Literature were well represented.

Proper names should always have capital initials, and sometimes it flatters the recipient to use them for his product as well. When I have to write to a manufacturer of humbugs, and in my letter I repeatedly refer to them as Humbugs, I am subtly conveying to him that I regard his Humbugs as something much more than mere humbugs.

Paragraphing

When it comes to paragraphing, again the rule is to put clearness and ease of understanding before everything else. Generally speaking, too many paragraphs are to be preferred to too few. A good rule is to regard a sentence as a mouthful, a paragraph as a course, and a letter as a meal. Let your division into paragraphs be governed by sense and not by mere appearance. Some typists seem to work on the principle that nine or ten lines is long enough for any paragraph. The paragraph is an entity, and a new paragraph should be started whenever a fresh subject is introduced, or a new phase of the same subject is examined. Starting a new paragraph is like taking a fresh breath. Occasionally, a single sentence can be picked out and made into a paragraph, for emphasis.

No more exact advice than this can be given, as quite naturally almost everything depends on the nature of the letter. Good rules to remember are—a fresh thought, a fresh paragraph; too many paragraphs rather than too few.

Presentation

We now come to the matter or presentation, or giving our letter its dress. Quite a number of points which come under this heading have already been dealt with. Once again, sense and clarity are the prime considerations. Appearance, as important as it is, comes second to sense.

A letter should not straggle all over the paper, but should be kept compact, and as far as possible squared, i.e., the sides of the letter should be as even as possible, with no odd lines overhanging. Accepted modern practice is to put the recipient's name and address at the head of the letter and not at the foot. If possible, this should be in three lines at the top left, with the date given in three lines on the top right, in this manner :

(249) Messrs. John Jones & Company	August
99, Market Square	2 2 n d
Newtown.	1 9 3 7

The normal indentation of paragraphs in a letter is ten spaces, and this squares very well if the salutation is either *Dear Sir* or *Dear Sirs*. But the position is not so simple if the letter begins with a proper name, and this is on the long side—for example, *Dear Mr. Murgatroyd*. With the punctuational signs this takes up twenty spaces, and it would look very ugly if all the paragraphs were indented twenty spaces. It is better in these circumstances to start all paragraphs, including the first, flush on the left. In a short letter the appearance is improved if an extra line of white space is left between paragraphs beginning flush in this way, i.e. two spaces instead of the usual one.

Ending the Letter

Where a letter ends with *Yours faithfully*, or *Yours very truly*, a good, cleanly displayed ending can be accomplished. Fortunately, this ending is accepted modern practice, but there are still a few old-fashioned firms who persist in the long drawn out end to a letter, in this manner :

(250) Assuring you of our best attention,
 We beg to remain, Dear Sirs,
 With compliments,
 Yours very truly,

This sort of straggling end looks bad, and should be avoided. Here are three examples of good display of the end and signature of letters.

- (251) With compliments,
Yours very truly,
Blank-Dash, Ltd.
James Blank-Dash
Managing Director
- (252) With regards,
Sincerely yours,
James Blank-Dash
Managing Director :
Blank-Dash, Ltd.
- (253) Yours faithfully,
pp. Blank-Dash, Ltd.,
John Jones
Chief Accountant

Should *per pro* or *p.p.* be used before the name of a firm or company? It is largely a matter of taste. In a few instances, legal considerations will dictate its use; but it is very questionable whether the simple presence or absence of the words or initials would determine a question of liability. Reference here is, of course, to letters and not legal documents, though a letter may constitute itself or become a legal document. Normally, directors of limited companies dispense with *per pro* and *p.p.*, while subordinates are required to use them. Dignity seems to enter largely into it.

Generally speaking, business letters should be ended *Yours truly*, *Yours very truly* or *Yours faithfully*. Some firms temper the apparent coldness of this finish by the use of some such courtesy phrase as *With compliments* or *At your service*. Whether or not these are used is largely a matter of taste. Some concerns still adhere to the courtesy finish: *Assuring you of our best attention at all times*. This has lost any value it ever had, because it is so obviously a stereotyped finish devoid of all sincerity. The writer has seen it solemnly appended to letters which were written in terms completely at variance with the sentiment expressed in the conventional closing sentence! Some firms try to get away from the conventional *Yours truly* or *Yours faithfully* by using some such ending as *Yours for better doughnuts* or *Yours for a Brighter Britain*. Such a striving for originality is really rather pathetic.

The transaction of business happily gives rise to many friendships, and from time to time letters are dictated which are of so personal a nature that the warmer close, *Yours sincerely*, is appropriate and justified. A point to watch here is that the phrase *Yours sincerely* is not followed immediately by the name of the firm, but by the name of the individual. Compare examples (251) and (252) above.

In conclusion, here is an example of a run-on ending :

(254) If you will do this, your kindness will be much appreciated by

Yours very truly,

This is occasionally permissible, but the "trick" can be overdone and misapplied, as here :

(255) When you have finished with it, please return the drawing to

Yours faithfully,

The X.L. Fog Lamp Co.

when it becomes merely irritating. In any case, it is impossible to improve on the injured gentleman who concluded a letter with these words :

(256) You, Sir, are my mortal enemy, and

I am,

Yours

REFERENCE :

"Correct Punctuation and Effective Sentence Construction" : Max Crombie (W. Foulsham & Co., Ltd.)

NOTE : The author desires to acknowledge the courtesy of Letts' Quikref Diaries, Ltd., in permitting the incorporation in this chapter of certain material originally contributed to their *Printer's Diary*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Business Stationery

Quite a number of items come under this heading, and these are the usual forms which will be found in a business office :

- Letterheads
- Memo. Form (for short letters)
- Inter-Office Communication Form
- Invoice
- Statement
- Order Form
- Delivery Advice Note
- "With Compliments" Slip
- Receipt Form
- Acknowledgement of Order Post Card
- Correspondence Post Card
- Label
- Envelopes

Professional persons, such as accountants and solicitors, use a formal type of stationery, about which little or nothing can be said here. Commercial concerns, however, can and should pay a great deal of attention to the design and printing of their business stationery, for reasons too obvious to need citation. The design of the stationery should suggest the nature of the business done. For example, a firm of printers priding themselves on being always in the van of new movements in commercial art, typography, etc., will choose a design for their letterhead and other business stationery of a modernistic nature, and change it frequently. On the other hand, a firm of publishers, specialising in serious textbooks of a scientific nature, will naturally have an extremely dignified letterhead. Again, a fashion house will use quite different stationery from a Beauty Salon. And so one could go on, multiplying instances.

Design of Stationery

Many substantial and old-established firms are very conservative in the design of their business stationery, because they fear to give a wrong impression. They know that a beautifully designed letterhead, produced regardless of cost, may be but the façade erected by a mushroom concern. It is true that many concerns start away with a very elaborate letterhead, and progressively simplify it as they become firmly established. The right course would seem to be to aim for a happy mean between the two extremes. Do not have an insipid, uninspired letterhead, but equally do not go in for ornateness bordering on vulgarity. It is true the insignificant little firms invariably have the most gorgeous headings, but in your anxiety not to be classed with these, do not go to the other extreme of having something utterly unworthy of your own size and importance.

The letterhead is the most frequently used item of a firm's stationery, and for our remarks on design we can usefully concentrate on this. The wisest plan is to get a satisfactory design for a letterhead, and then to design the other items in the stationery list to be in harmony with this.

A letterhead should be a letterhead and not a history of the firm. Every printer knows the heart-breaking experience of designing a really beautiful letterhead for a firm, and then having it utterly ruined by the customer insisting upon all sorts of additional matter being included. You may be very proud of the fact that you have seventeen branches overseas, and can communicate with them and your customers in no less than four different codes, but is it necessary to announce this on every sheet of letter-paper? In these circumstances, it is a good plan to use two different letterheads—the first with every item of information the board of directors think should be included, and the second bearing only the essential information. The first may be termed the “special” letterheading, and the second the “general purposes” heading. For 90 per cent or more of the correspondence, the simplified general purposes letterhead will be found perfectly adequate. Only for certain correspondence, which will automatically fall into a category by itself, need the special heading quoting the full addresses of all

the firm's branches, its cable addresses, telegraphic addresses, codes used, etc., be employed.

The idea of two distinct letterheads may be applied to almost all businesses. After you have been corresponding regularly with a firm for a month, you can, without any loss of dignity or effect, turn over to the use of a much simplified letterhead for this particular correspondent. Not only does this simplified letterhead usually cost less to produce, but it may provide 25 per cent. more space for the actual letter.

Symbols and trade marks, where of a suitable nature, should be incorporated in the letterhead design. Some firms are so well known by a trade mark or symbol that this can be a dominant feature of their letterheading design, with the name of the firm unobtrusively placed below, or even omitted altogether.

Where a quality letterheading, possibly die-stamped on hand-made paper, is adopted, it is wasteful to use this for all correspondence. A good plan is to use the best letterhead when writing to persons to whom we hope to sell, using a cheaper letter-paper to write to those from whom we are proposing to buy. A natural development of this is to use a third heading, cheaper still, for writing to members of one's own staff, branches, factories, etc.

The Picture of the Mill

Every printer is familiar with the customer who says "We leave the design of the letterhead entirely to you. You can do just exactly what you like, but we must have on it a large picture of the Mill." That "large picture of the Mill" is usually enough to make it utterly impossible to produce any decent design at all. The irony of it is that not infrequently the picture of the Mill is an unmitigated lie, grossly exaggerating the size of the premises, or including large areas of neighbouring buildings to which no title at all is held! One can sympathise with a firm which has a very modern and beautiful factory in desiring to have this illustrated, but it is much better that the picture should be printed on the back of the letterpaper and not made part of the heading itself.

Where it is absolutely necessary for a large amount of

matter to be accommodated on a letterhead, it is best placed in a panel on the left hand side. This requires very skilful handling, if it is not to look old-fashioned.

Limited Companies registered since 1916 are required by law to carry the directors' names. Many Companies registered since 1916 omit to give the directors' names, but there is really no point in needlessly going against the law, even though it seems to be very much a dead letter. If the inclusion of the directors' names seriously interferes with the design of the heading proper, they can be neatly placed in one or two lines at the foot of the paper. This device of including certain information in one or more lines at the extreme bottom of the sheet is a useful one to remember.

Methods of Printing Business Stationery

The four methods of printing business stationery are :

- (1) Letterpress ;
- (2) Lithography ;
- (3) Die-stamping ; and
- (4) Gravure.

These represent, of course, the three basic printing processes—from a raised surface ; from a level surface ; and from an engraved or incised surface. (Both die-stamping and gravure come in this last category.)

Letterpress Headings

Letterheads printed by the relief process, or letterpress, do not call for any lengthy description as they are very familiar. It would be quite wrong to assume that only the cheaper and less striking headings are printed by letterpress ; as this process lends itself to the production of a really beautiful work in several colours, and a well-printed letterpress heading is definitely to be preferred to a poor piece of die-stamping. Letterpress embraces printing from hand-cut rubber plates with special water colour inks ; and some extremely attractive full colour effects can be obtained in this way. This is mentioned purely as an example of the less usual letterpress methods. Of course, where a very dignified letterhead set throughout in printer's type is

required, letterpress is obviously the process. The use of coloured inks in combination with grey instead of black, and the choice of a tinted or patterned paper, are other ways of giving distinction to relief-printed letterheads.

Litho'd Headings

Offset lithography particularly lends itself to the production of beautiful letterheads in full colours. Generally speaking, it is not economical to go in for a heading lithographed in three or four colours unless the quantities used justify placing orders for 10,000 to 20,000 sheets at a time. Of course, once the plates are paid for, reprints work out at a cheaper rate. A number of firms still persist in the use of headings of the steel-engraving type. Very rarely indeed, if ever, are these actually printed direct from the steel plates. Normally the steel engraving is used to provide an original master print only, which is then photographed and reproduced in quantities by lithography.

Some manufacturing stationers make a special point of stock lithographed headings for different retail trades. These are invariably well designed, and quantities may be purchased at a much lower rate than if the design were exclusive to one user. The selected design is reserved to the purchaser in his own town, so there is no danger of a rival trader using the same stock design. The stock design ready printed is purchased by a local printer, and over-printed with the retailer's name and address.

Die-Stamped Headings

Everyone in business is familiar with the die-stamped heading, in which the design and lettering stand slightly in relief. Die-stamped headings are an example of intaglio printing, i.e., they are printed from a copper plate in which the design is etched or engraved. The plate is inked, wiped, leaving the ink only in the engraved or sunken portions, the paper is laid on and the impression taken. This is a slow process, which accounts for the relatively high cost of die-stamped headings. Usually, they are printed by hand, but it is possible to do die-stamping by machinery.

An imitation of a die-stamped heading can be obtained by printing first in letterpress, then dusting the sheet with

a resinous powder, passing the sheet over a hot plate and wiping clean. The heat causes the powder to combine with the letterpress ink, and when set it has a raised appearance superficially similar to die-stamping. The disadvantage is that the printed part cracks easily if folded, and can be very easily scratched off. This pseudo-die-stamping process has various names, one of which is Virkotype.

Gravure Headings

Letterheads printed by gravure are comparatively rare. There is no real reason for this, because gravure is a very beautiful process, both for monochrome and colour work, and it is perfectly feasible to print it on paper primarily selected for its good typing quality. The factor of initial cost doubtless has something to do with the limited use of gravure headings, but for a firm which can order 50,000 or more headings at a time, gravure is an economical process. If it is desired to reproduce a photograph in a letter-heading, gravure is pre-eminently the process.

It is of course perfectly possible to produce hybrid letterheads—i.e., printed by a combination of two processes. A concern with several branches would find it feasible to print the pictorial part of the letterhead by litho-offset, and to keep these in stock, to be over-printed with the names of the branches by letterpress from time to time, as required. In exactly the same way, one could have a combination of gravure and letterpress, or of die-stamping and letterpress.

Choosing the Paper

Careful attention should be paid to selection of paper for letterheads and other business stationery. Sometimes the desire for something different leads one to a selection of a paper which is not particularly suitable for typing. Before any paper is finally chosen, sheets should be subjected to the practical test of typing, and particularly erasing. The typist is not yet born who does not make an occasional mistake, and if the paper has a surface which is immediately destroyed by the application of a typewriter eraser, then this paper is unsuitable for a letterhead. It should be noted that this does not apply to letterheads which will be used exclusively for duplicated sales letters, and not for individually

typed letters. Actually, there is no need to go outside the range of papers especially produced for stationery purposes, because a sufficiently wide range of qualities, weights and shades is produced to meet every reasonable requirement.

Most firms seem to prefer white paper for business stationery, or at least for the letterhead, but delightfully pleasing effects can be achieved by using tinted papers. The shade of paper should be definitely part of the colour scheme, and a very tasteful effect can be obtained by using an ink which is a darker shade of the colour of the paper. On a dull grey paper one could print a dark grey and a bright second colour. On a buff paper one could print dark brown and, say, vermillion orange. Special inks are made which give excellent coverage; so that, for example, a bright blue can be printed on a grey paper without the greyness of the paper discounting the brightness of the blue.

Patterned papers, or those given a distinctive appearance in the finishing process, are perhaps not so widely used as they might be. A hammer-finished paper—your printer will show you an example—is quite a pleasant change from the ordinary plain paper or linen-finished paper. Then there are novelty papers, an example of which is the paper which is printed with a reproduction of wood grain, or actually carrying a microscopically thin veneer of wood. One can get limed oak paper, birds-eye maple paper, and so on. To use such a paper, a firm must have some logical connection with wood. Parchment papers which are semi-transparent provide another example of a novelty paper for occasional use.

Distinctive appearance can be given to an inexpensive one-colour letterpress heading by getting your printer to use a paper with a neat coloured edge or border. Sheets with the coloured borders already printed can be purchased from wholesale paper houses by any printer, at a much smaller cost than he could print the border specially. Envelopes to match are also supplied.

The remarks which have been made above concerning letterheads also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other items in the stationery range. The various items are members of one family, and as such should bear a pronounced family resemblance to each other. In other words, it behoves a

firm to have its complete stationery range designed as a harmonious whole, and not as individual items.

The most justified departure from complete harmony throughout a series is the adoption of different coloured papers for different forms. There is much to be said for invoices being on a distinctively coloured paper, so that they may be instantly picked out. The same applies to statement forms. Even then the design can be in keeping.

Envelopes

The subject of envelopes is a big one, but almost everything which can be said is covered by the phrase "fitness to purpose." An envelope has a job of work to do, and should be chosen, for quality, size and substance, to do that job efficiently without waste. It is false economy to use cheap and nasty envelopes which travel badly through the post, to arrive soiled and damaged at the other end.

The normal correspondence envelope should, wherever possible, be of the same quality paper as that used for the letterhead. Where the expense of having envelopes specially made is considered not justified, something very close can usually be obtained from stock. The great advantage of using a white paper for the letterhead is that almost any good quality white cartridge envelope can be used in conjunction with it. - It is not considered good practice to send out a tinted letterhead in a white envelope. The extra cost of having envelopes made to match is relatively small, and is usually justified by results. Where a very expensive paper is used for the letterhead, however, it is seldom necessary to use this for the envelope. Where toughness is the quality most desired, Manilla envelopes have the decided advantage. Envelopes of a size larger than 8 x 5 ins. should be made of tough Manilla, if it is desired to keep the contents intact. A cheap envelope is the falsest of false economies.

The standard size of letterhead is Large Post 4to, 10½ x 8½ ins., and the standard envelope used in conjunction with this is 5½ x 3½ ins. Correspondence is given a more distinguished appearance if the sheet, instead of being folded into six, is folded into three and an envelope 8½ x 3½ ins. is used. Envelopes of this size may be had with the opening the narrow way or the long way. The longwise opening

has a more professional appearance. Where a very large number of letters are sent out, however, it is more economical to use the $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ ins. size.

Envelopes Plain or Printed?

A much discussed point is whether the envelope should be plain or printed. It is probably safe to say that the major part of business correspondence could travel quite efficiently and safely in a plain envelope. Where there is any likelihood of a letter not reaching the recipient and therefore requiring to be returned, it is an obvious advantage to have the name and address of the sender on the envelope. The usual place for the name and address on an envelope is on the flap, but some firms have adopted the use of a symbol or trade mark on the face of the envelope. This should be placed in either the upper or lower left-hand corner, as the right-hand side of the envelope is by custom left for the address and postage stamp. In considering printing on the face of an envelope, remember that the Post Office regulations will not permit of anything being done or used which will detract from the instant readability of the name and address. Before having envelopes printed in any quantity, it is always best to submit a specimen for approval to the local Postmaster. Incidentally, the Post Office have no great liking for envelopes printed on brightly coloured paper, and may refuse to accept these. Large envelopes may be made of dark-hued paper, provided a gummed label on white or light tinted paper is used for the name and address. This use of a dark coloured envelope and a light label can be made very distinctive for sales promotion work.

Sometimes it is desired to send out two or three thin sheets unfolded, and when these are placed in a suitable large envelope a very flimsy package is achieved, which simply invites being badly crushed and torn in the post. It costs very little to get from your printer some pieces of thin strawboard cut to a suitable size or sizes, which can be used as stiffeners. Usually when these stiffeners are used, the package is still within the minimum postage rate, so that their use protects the contents against damage without extra postage costs being incurred.

Lock-Tuck Envelopes

It will be expected that something be said about envelopes which are specially designed to go through the post unsealed. A few years ago one could send any sized envelope through the post with the flap simply tucked in. But it was found that these packages acted as a trap for other letters, and the Post Office now has a regulation that no opening in an unsealed postal packet shall exceed $4\frac{1}{2}$ ins. in length. (Small envelopes, e.g., $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ ins., are allowed to go through with a tucked-in flap, as these are not deep enough to act as a trap.)

As soon as this regulation came into force, envelope makers vied with each other in ingenuity in devising special devices for allowing contents of an envelope to be examined, and thus qualifying for the lower rate, without contravening the regulation about the $4\frac{1}{2}$ ins. maximum opening. These envelopes are much used for circularising, and are usually known as "lock-tuck" envelopes. Any printer and stationer will be pleased to submit specimens and prices of this special type of envelope. There are many kinds, mostly patented, and they all seem reasonably efficient.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Facsimile Letter Reproduction

WHERE many copies of the same letter are required, they are reproduced by one or other of the facsimile letter-printing processes. There are four ways of producing a facsimile letter: we can print it by relief process; we can print it by a planographic process; we can print it by an intaglio process; or we can print it through a stencil. Which process we use will be governed by two factors:

1. The degree of perfection or quality we are aiming for; and
2. The quantity required.

Perhaps the simplest way of reproducing a facsimile letter is to get a letterpress printer to set it in typewriter type, and to print it on one of his small machines on one's own letter-paper. This is the simplest and easiest method, and, as might be expected, is the least desirable from the standpoint of close imitation of actual typewriting. Not one person in a hundred is deceived by such a letter, because it looks exactly what it is—printed. Some printers have a typewriter type which, instead of being clean and sharp in face, actually reproduces the texture of the typewriter ribbon. If this type is printed in a purple or grey ink, the resulting letter might pass at a hurried glance for an individually typed communication. Whatever type is used for printer-printed letters, it is always best to use a grey ink, as jet black ink completely destroys the last shred of verisimilitude.

Office Printing Machines

The Roneotype machine may be cited as an example of the office printing machine working on the relief principle,

which gives a much closer approximation to actual type-writing than printer-set type. The Roneotype machine, and others of this pattern, print "through a ribbon" from composed type, but this does not come into actual contact with the paper. The type presses on one side of an ink-impregnated fabric (it is really a misnomer to call it a "ribbon" because it is about 10 ins. wide and several feet in length) in exactly the same way that the type bar on a typewriter hits the ribbon, and the other side of the "ribbon" makes an impression upon the paper. Because the ink-impregnated fabric used on this type of duplicating machine has the same texture as a typewriter ribbon, it will be appreciated that the effect is almost indistinguishable from individual typing.

"Litho" Office Printing Machines

The Rotaprint machine may be taken as typical of the duplicating and office printing machine which works on the planographic principle. The machine has rollers for damping the plates, as well as ink rollers, and the principle utilised is the well-known lithographic one of the antipathy of grease and water. With this type of machine the sales letter can either be typed direct on to the metal plate with an ordinary typewriter, but using a special ribbon; or it may be typed in the ordinary way on a sheet of paper, photographed, and a negative obtained. This is used to print on to the light-sensitized metal plate, in exactly the same way that designs are printed in photo-lithography. The metal plate requires special treatment before it is ready to print.

Excellent work can be done on this type of machine, and an extremely close approximation of the original typing obtained. One advantage which this machine has over that which prints from composed type is that the metal plates may be filed in envelopes for future use, a collection of some hundreds taking up very little room. The disadvantage, of course, is that it is not so easy to make corrections, as with the composed-type machine, though these are possible up to a point.

Printing the Heading as Well

With both types of machine it is perfectly feasible to print the letterhead at the same time as the letter itself, but as both letterhead and letter then appear in exactly the same shade of ink, the illusion of an individually typed letter is seriously discounted. Many concerns which possess machines of either the Roneotype or Rotaprint pattern print their own letterheads in quantities in one or two colours, and draw on this stock for sales letter printing as required. In this way the whole job is done on the office printing machine, but the appearance of a printer-printed heading and a separately "typed" letter is maintained.

Gravure printing is not much used for sales letter production, except where it is desired to print the letterhead itself by gravure, and for reasons of economy the letter is printed at the same time. Reference here, of course, is to monochrome gravure. Where colour gravure is used, provided the quantity is large enough to justify it, it is perfectly feasible to print the heading and letter in such a combination of colours as will provide an attractively coloured heading, and a letter in very dark grey, closely akin to actual typing.

The Stencil Process

There are many machines on the market which duplicate letters by the stencil process. Specially prepared wax sheets are supplied, and the letter is typed on these on an ordinary typewriter, with the ribbon either removed or put out of action. The sharp edged typewriter type cuts the stencil, but special fibres in the waxed paper prevent any completely isolated pieces, such as the middle of the letter O, from dropping out. The machine used for the printing has a liberally inked surface over which the stencil is carefully stretched. As the drum rotates, the duplicating paper is brought into contact with the surface of the stencil, and sufficient ink is squeezed through to make the impression on the paper. After a number of copies have been printed, it is necessary to lift the stencil in order to re-ink the surface underneath.

Stencil printing is perfectly adequate for a very large number of business purposes, but its strongest advocate could not maintain that it gives a close approximation to an individually typed letter. Stencil-printed matter is always immediately recognisable as such.

Facsimile Handwriting

An enterprising firm in London has recently exploited a process whereby handwriting can be reproduced with such fidelity as to be indistinguishable from the real thing. The appearance of ink-written matter which has been blotted is most faithfully reproduced, and the process has great possibilities for sales letter reproduction, where something unusual is required. An excellent idea is to have a letter typed and duplicated by one of the processes described above, and a postscript or other endorsement added in facsimile handwriting. In this way the illusion is greatly heightened, and the handwritten endorsement or postscript, if cleverly done, can capture interest and ensure that the letter is read. This same facsimile handwriting process is very useful for putting a note on an envelope which will guarantee the contents being examined. For example, in one corner of the envelope can be scribbled the words in red ink "Urgent action wanted here" with some indecipherable initials underneath. The idea, of course, is to make it look as though the envelope has been endorsed by someone in authority.

Novelty Letters

Reference has been made in a previous chapter to novelty papers, and a wood-grained paper was cited as an example. It may be again referred to here as providing an illustration of the out-of-the-ordinary letter which can be adopted when it is recognised that an ordinary letter will receive such scant attention. For a firm of furniture manufacturers to send out a sales letter on this wood-grained paper would be most appropriate. An engineering firm could use a sales letter reproduced exactly as a blue print, with possibly one or two typical engineering sketches in the margin. This imitation blue print letter is a capital way of ensuring interest of technical people, who simply love blue prints.

The thumb-nail or marginal sketch referred to in the preceding paragraph is an idea which can be widely adopted. Another idea which has been used to compel attention is to send out a sales letter which looks as though it has been freely annotated by the sender. There is something fascinating about a short letter which has had various remarks scribbled around it. They simply have to be puzzled out.

Adding the Signature

Where a limited number of sales letters have to be sent out, it is worth while for these to be individually signed in ink. If the letters are addressed to individuals, more or less well-known to the signatory, it is a good plan to leave off the salutation, "Dear Mr. Blank," when duplicating; and the executive or director signing the letter writes this in by hand at the same time as he signs the letter. This is not feasible where a long list is being circulated; but for a short, "hand picked" list it is very effective, and invariably results in getting the letter read. It may also help materially to get the letter past the "post censor" (*see page 95*).

Postal Publicity Charges

The cost of duplication of sales letters depends on the method used and on the quantity of letters duplicated.

Firms generally quote at so much per 1,000 letters, and the cost per letter decreases as the order increases. Prices are quoted for quarto and for foolscap letters. A quarto letter is reckoned as 30 lines, and a foolscap letter as 40 lines. Additional lines are charged extra.

The stencil method of duplicating is usually cheaper for relatively small quantities, but when the number goes over 5,000 it becomes as cheap to have the duplicating done by the "ribbon" process.

Letters in two colours are charged extra.

Letters in foreign languages also cost extra, according to the language.

There are additional charges for letters containing tabular matter or special display.

Before placing an order for the duplication of sales letters

it is best to follow the normal business practice of getting quotations and specimens of work from two or three firms at least. Anyone living in a large town will find there are plenty to choose from. In the Classified (Trades and Professions) Telephone Directory for London there is a very long list of firms that perform this service, under the heading "Duplicating and Copying Offices."

Addressing

Where the envelope addressing is done by a postal publicity agency from lists of their own provision, the charge for addressing envelopes will naturally vary according to the nature of the list. Some lists "owned" by postal publicity concerns have been compiled at considerable expense and trouble, and it is only natural that a much higher rate will be charged for these. In order to protect these special lists, it is not unusual for the agency to insist on doing the enclosing and despatching themselves, and to give a certificate of posting. Otherwise, unscrupulous advertisers could buy addressed envelopes and copy the names and addresses from them for future use. It is, of course, quite easy and usual to purchase the standard lists.

Where the names and addresses are carried on stencils, and the envelopes are addressed from these mechanically, the charge is lower than when the envelopes are to be addressed by hand or individually typewritten.

Enclosing

The charge for enclosing sales letters and printed matter is based on the number of movements involved, and for the sake of economy these should be kept as few as possible. There is a big difference between the charge for enclosing something very simple, like a single-sheet letter, and the cost of enclosing something elaborate or troublesome.

There are, of course, additional costs for fixing stamps (or franking) and mailing. These depend on the size, weight, and nature of the mailing.

Signature Blocks

Wood-cut blocks are used to imitate handwritten signatures,

and one can be cut from a specimen signature for quite a small cost. However, letters "signed" in this manner are charged extra to the duplicating charge.

"Matching In"

"Matching In" (*see page 97*) can be done from stencils or typewritten. The charge for the former is usually less than the charge for the latter.

True Sales Letters

The sales letter, as the term quite clearly implies, is concerned primarily if not solely with sales promotion. Anyone who has attempted at any time to sell something knows that sales resistance is a very real factor, and it is this resistance which we have to overcome by the persuasiveness and convincingness of our letter.

Sales letters may for convenience be put into two categories: (1) the specific sales letter, the object of which is to make a concrete offer, capable of specific acceptance; and (2) the non-specific sales letter, which is intended to do little more than remind the recipient of our existence and the availability of our goods, should he at any time want anything which we are in a position to supply.

Here are examples respectively of specific and non-specific sales letters:

(259) Dear Sirs,

As consistent users of salesprint, you must frequently be in the market for clever ideas crystallised in first-class artwork.

We—my colleague, Brian Masterman, and I—have between us 17 years' experience of art in commerce, and between us we cover pretty nearly every phase of designing. Our speciality so far as we have one, is real live figure work—men who are men and girls who are . . . girls with that something extra the others haven't got.

We do not send out specimens, unless they are requested. Would you like us to send you our miniature portfolio? 'Phone Central 0099.

Yours very truly,
Rita Studios, Ltd.
Seth Dashwood
Director.

Not at all a bad letter, for a negative example. It is written in a somewhat racy style calculated to appeal to an advertising manager. But here, for comparison, is a specific sales letter.

(260) Dear Sirs,

You are large and consistent users of salesprint, but so far as we know—we may be wrong, of course—you have not used a Christmas Card.

Some years ago, we were the originators of specially written and designed Christmas Cards for firms dealing direct with the public to send out to customers, purely as a goodwill gesture.

Since then we have at this time of the year made rather a speciality of this work, and we have letters on our files (you are welcome to see them) to the effect that our Christmas Cards have been directly responsible for increased sales, so much have they been appreciated by the recipients. One firm alone last year sent out 180,000 Christmas Cards of our designing and production, and reported excellent results.

We make it a rule to produce a Christmas Card each year for only one firm in any trade or business. We have no present customer whose interests could possibly clash with yours, hence this preliminary letter.

May we come and talk to you, preparatory to preparing some concrete suggestions? Just telephone Central 0099.

Yours very truly,
Rita Studios, Ltd.
Seth Dashwood
Director.

Note how this letter is written in a personal vein, which suggests that it was expressly dictated. Yet it contains nothing which would prevent it from being sent to a number of firms. Example (259) is by no means so vague and general as some non-specific sales letters sent out, but example (260) clearly has the advantage because it sets out to sell, not art work in general, but the idea of a specially designed Christmas Card. The "offer" it makes is a tangible one, and the recipient is provided with a definite reason for telephoning "Central 0099."

A specific sales letter is much more likely to be productive of sales, and thus contribute to its own cost, than the non-

specific type. A good rule is never to write a non-specific sales letter if the subject can be modified to allow it to be treated in a specific manner.

Reaching the Man Who Matters

One of the most serious problems which confront the writer of sales letters is to ensure that the letter will reach the man for whom it is specifically intended. Cynics and disappointed venturers into the world of mail order will tell you that no sales letter ever gets beyond the office boy. This is certainly not true. It is probably true that the majority of sales letters are intercepted before they reach the man who really matters, but a number certainly get through to the person in authority. Much of the art of sales letter production—and this covers the actual writing, the method of reproduction, the design of letterhead, the quality and nature of paper used, etc., lies in using every device and artifice which will increase the chances of the letter getting past the man who sifts the post and “throws away the circulars.”

A few long-sighted executives have enough good business sense to insist that everything which arrives by post shall be seen by them or by a responsible deputy. Such men do not allow the office boy to censor their post, either in or out. They feel themselves perfectly capable of destroying anything which merits destruction.

Not long ago, a publisher sent out to a number of selected business men, on approval, a volume of business printing which cost over £3 per copy to produce, though it was offered at much under this price. In certain instances this volume failed to reach the executives to whom it was addressed; and in at least one instance it was found to have been intercepted by an underling, whose excuse was that he thought it was “only a catalogue.” This was a book of several hundred large pages, containing some of the most beautiful printing work possible to produce, and containing articles by recognised authorities, of the greatest practical value to a responsible business executive. And yet this individual felt no compunction whatever in intercepting it and preventing it from reaching his superior, to whom it was addressed!

Unquestionably, many excellent business opportunities are lost through this inexplicable and foolish British habit of allowing anyone from the office boy upwards to tear open the morning's post and to throw away what he likes, or rather what he dislikes.

Private or Business Address?

Before going further it might be useful to differentiate between the sales letter which goes to the recipient's private address and that which goes to his place of business. Where the letter goes to a private address, the odds are very greatly in favour of it being at least examined. It is the letter which goes to a business address which has to get past that self-appointed censor, and which therefore requires to be written with much greater skill and subtlety. Not even the most hardened office boy has the temerity to destroy a letter which is individually typed. It follows, therefore, that the closer the sales letter approximates to a personally typed letter, the greater will be its chance of arriving on the desk of the man who matters. Some concerns selling high-grade products are so convinced of this that they take the trouble of typing individually every sales letter sent out. Though this means the employment of a large force of typists, they maintain that the increased results justify the extra cost.

Leaving aside the individually typed letter, and confining our attention to letters which are reproduced by one or other of the facsimile processes, we have many degrees of quality, ranging from the letter which is so beautifully duplicated and matched in that it takes an expert eye to tell it from an individually typed letter, to the letter which is not even duplicated, but most obviously printer-printed. What measure of trouble and expense we shall go to in producing our letters in the appearance of individually typed communications, will of course be governed by circumstances and the many factors which are dealt with in this and the succeeding chapters. It is far from being an easy point to decide. We have known instances of where the most beautifully produced sales letters have proved dismal failures; while others which most blatantly proclaimed themselves to be what they were have proved highly successful from the standpoint of sales.

Experimenting with Letters

Generally speaking, it pays to produce a sales letter of the highest standard of quality which can be economically afforded. Experience is a better guide than theory, when all is said and done; and a concern which is using sales letters regularly will conduct experiments with almost scientific precision; and will determine eventually exactly the type of letter which produces the best results in proportion to expenditure. One well-known concern experimented over a term of years with sales letters, in order to discover which type produced the best results. Finally, as a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* in experiments, they sent out a piece of printed matter with no sales letter at all. To their complete astonishment this produced easily the best results of the whole series! It would be dangerous to argue from the particular to the general, and to deduce from this one instance that sales letters were quite unnecessary.

In my own practice, I always endeavour to write and present a sales letter in the closest possible imitation of any individual communication. After all, a sales letter is primarily a letter, and as such is a personal and intimate thing. If the matter to be communicated is of such an impersonal nature that it matters nothing that the sales letter can be most obviously duplicated, then the argument for having a letter at all breaks down, and one might just as well incorporate the material in a simple printed leaflet. In fact, on a number of occasions I have taken much of the matter it was proposed to incorporate in a single sales letter and have put it in separate printed form, in order that what remained might be dealt with in a personal and intimate manner, as befitted a letter. A letter should always be a letter, and not a disguised pamphlet.

Getting Past the "Post Censor"

Reference has already been made to the gentleman who sifts the post. Fortunately, he is not always a person of great penetration, and if he has a heavy post to get through he will not read more than the first two or three lines of any letter. An excellent device in sales letter writing is to start off with a few lines which suggest that the letter is in

reply to one received from a firm itself. We cannot start off "We thank you for your letter to hand . . ." in order to deceive the post-opener, when we have not received any letter; but we can use a little subtlety in the phrasing of our opening paragraph in order to suggest that the letter we are writing is not unsolicited. Compare these examples :

(261) Dear Sir,

It is with real pleasure we send you an advance copy of our new booklet "Golf Yarns—Ancient and Modern."

(262) Dear Sir,

The booklet enclosed, "The Truth about Fixed Trusts," is the one referred to in our announcements in the Financial Press, which you must have seen.

(263) Dear Sir,

Some car brochures you send for are distinguished by the lavishness of the illustrations and the vagueness of the technical information. . . . This one is different.

See also example (265).

"Solicited" and "Unsolicited" Letters

Reference should perhaps have been made earlier to solicited as distinct from unsolicited sales letters. I may be one of thousands of persons who clip a coupon from a newspaper advertisement and send for literature. Clearly, we cannot all receive an individually typed letter, but the fact remains that the letter we receive is in reply to a request of ours. In other words, the sales letter is solicited, and should start off in such a way that it is obvious that it is solicited. Here is an example of a poor opening of a solicited sales letter :

(264) Dear Sir,

Napoleon may or may not have said we are a nation of shopkeepers, but he would have had nothing but praise for our "Simplified Book-keeping for Retail Traders."

Compare this good opening to an unsolicited letter :

(265) Dear Sir,

Your interest in our "Simplified Book-keeping for Retail Traders"—of which we have pleasure in sending you full particulars—will quickly develop into enthusiasm.

Example (265) might have been written in answer to an enquiry for particulars, but (264) could never have been, save by a novice who did not understand the first thing about sales letter writing.

The unsolicited sales letter is that which is sent out "into the blue." On the principle that the director of a firm should smoke cigars, if he does not, a cigar firm could take the Directory of Directors and send to selected names therefrom a price-list with a covering sales letter. This would be an example of the unsolicited sales letter. It will be at once appreciated that it is with this type of sales letter that we have to exercise the greatest measure of ingenuity in starting it off in such a way that first it will get past the man who opens the post, and second will secure the interest of the man to whom it is written. (261), (262), (263) and (265) are examples of the device of opening an unsolicited sales letter in such a way as to suggest previous interest on the part of the recipient. It must be appreciated that this device requires to be used with care and discrimination if it is not to defeat its own purpose.

"Matching In" the Name and Address

The necessity has been stressed of doing all we can to ensure that our sales letter reaches the man (or woman) for whom it is intended. It might be thought that the most obvious way of doing this would be to address it to the individual personally, both on the envelope and on the letter itself. This, of course, is the ideal, but in many instances the cost involved of typing in the name and address of the recipient on the letter is prohibitive. In other cases, the name of the individual is not known, and the letter has to be addressed to the firm. A compromise is to address the letter to the Managing Director, the Secretary, the General Manager,

or some other executive title. This, however, is very little better than addressing the letter simply to the firm as a firm.

Again, it is impossible to lay down any hard and fast rule. Very broadly speaking, the wider the net is flung, the less the necessity of discovering the names of individuals, and of matching in those names on the letters. In sending out a batch of 20,000 postal publicity "shots," quite apart from any consideration of expense, one would not trouble to match in the names and addresses at the head of the letters. This is—if we may use a "fashionable" word to which we drew attention on page 23—a "broadcast" offer, as distinct from an individualised offer. So long as we obtain our due percentage of business, we shall not be greatly concerned where it has come from—except of course that we shall have the common business prudence to keep a careful record of all purchasers.

The cigar example cited above will also serve as an instance of an individualised offer. Smokers of expensive cigars these days are not so numerous that we can profitably "broadcast" an offer. The sales target is much more concentrated, and intensive fire is required. For this reason we shall personalise each letter by the inclusion of the name and address.

Typing in the name and address at the head of a letter is termed "matching in," and requires to be very carefully done, for the obvious reason that if it is badly done, it directly defeats its own purpose, and positively draws attention to the fact that the letter is duplicated. Careless concerns will have their sales letters duplicated "through a ribbon" from brand new type, then match in the name and address on some ancient typewriter with a worn ribbon. At other times not even sufficient care is taken to see that the name and address is added in the same size and style of typewriter type as that used for the body of the letter. Such matching in is a contradiction of the term.

Most publicity concerns which specialise in the production of sales letters which simulate individual typing go to a great deal of trouble to ensure that the name and address is matched in in the same shade of ink as that used for duplicating the letter. A device which at one time was most successful, but the value of which has been discounted by

widespread use, is that of using a red ribbon for filling in the name and address at the head of a letter duplicated in black. In other words, no attempt is made to match in for colour of ribbon, but only for style of type.

If the typing in of the individual's name at the head of a letter is prohibited by reason of expense or exigencies of production, there is no reason why this should not be used on the envelope. Some users of postal publicity resort to the use of the word "Personal" or "Private" on the envelope in order to increase the chances of the letter reaching the individual named. Quite often this device is accompanied by the use of a 1¢d. stamp and an unsealed envelope, and it is difficult to see what real purpose it serves. It is far better to go to some trouble to make your communication look like a personal letter than to produce it any old fashion, and then label it "Personal." Moreover, it may so annoy the recipient that the letter is destroyed, unread, in disgust.

Sales Letters in Series

Sales letters can either be written singly or in carefully planned series. Which is right and proper will be governed by the circumstances. The time to write a letter is when you have something to say, and it seems just as foolish to write a letter when you have nothing to say as it is to refrain from writing when you have something. The old idea that "every customer must be written to at least once a month" may be just an easy way of side-tracking a problem.

Whether or not you will use a single sales letter or a series must be determined by what you have to say. One good sales letter with some punch to it is much better than half a dozen feeble efforts. Dripping water may wear away a stone, but it will not water much cattle. It is better to write once a quarter and have something to say each time than to write once a month or so and make yourself a nuisance to your correspondent.

Any one of a number of reasons may justify a series of sales letters. We may be producing a monthly price list, and nothing is more natural than we shall elect to send out with every list a sales letter. We may produce a monthly House Magazine or House Journal and send a sales letter

with this, though it is usually considered adequate to send out a house magazine without any covering letter.

We may decide to send out a series of monthly letters, and to deal specifically with one or other of our products in each letter. Usually such a letter would be accompanied by a piece of sales literature dealing in detail with the product of the month.

Where only one product is sold, for example, an inter-office telephone system, each letter could take a single selling point and deal with it exhaustively, though we hope not exhaustingly. Finally, we have the sales letter series which says the same thing over and over again, but seeks to avoid wearisome reiteration by presenting the single theme in as many different ways as possible.

Using "Stuffers"

What has been written in a previous chapter on the subject of using enclosures to keep letters as brief as possible should be recalled here. The American user of postal publicity is a great believer in getting maximum value for his postage stamp, and on the other side of the Atlantic they are very fond of using what are eloquently termed "stuffers." These are little pieces of print—many of them quite well written and excellently printed—which are scooped up almost at random and inserted in the envelope with the communication proper, in order to bring it up to the maximum weight permissible for the minimum postage. At times as many as eight or nine pieces of print are contained in the one envelope, and one can only assume from the persistence with which the practice is followed in the United States that it does produce results.

In this country, however, we are more conservative, and fight shy of introducing a lot of counter-attractions with our message proper. Five items in one envelope mean that the odds are four to one against the right one being seen first. Many experienced postal publicity users maintain that it is always advisable to keep down the number of separate pieces in an envelope to the absolute minimum. This dictum would seem to preclude entirely the use of anything in the nature of "stuffers." It would, however, be wrong to go so far as that, and doubtless there are many

concerns in this country which could point to the profitable use of enclosures produced with the sole idea in mind of including them in other correspondence. The distinction drawn at the outset of this chapter between a form letter and a sales letter should be recalled. Generally, while an enclosure dealing with something different from the main subject of the letter may successfully be used with a form letter, it is a mistake to use such enclosures with sales letters. It is a great mistake to attempt to sell two things at the same time. Personally, I have always worked on the principle that when I send a man a sales letter there are sufficient distractions and counter-attractions all around him to divert his attention from my letter, without my gratuitously introducing still further counter-attractions in the very envelope in which my communication reaches him.

Another very broad rule would be to say that "stuffers" may be used successfully with letters sent out in answer to specific enquiries, because we know initial interest is there; but where the letter comes "out of the blue" it should have the benefit of undivided attention.

CHAPTER TEN

Sales Promotion With Letters

CAN sales be promoted with letters? Most certainly they can. The best way of selling a man anything is to call upon him in person. If this is not feasible, the next best thing is to write him a personal letter. If a personally dictated and individually typed letter is not feasible, then we must take one more step down and come to the sales letter, with or without printed matter. The point it is wished to emphasise is that the sales letter should not be regarded as a minor item in postal publicity, but as a major item with tremendous possibilities. One should not think of the sales letter as something to go with the literature, but rather of the literature as something to accompany the sales letter.

The point as to whether sales letters should be individually typed or duplicated has already been dealt with at some length. As desirable as it may be to type letters individually, the factors of expedience and expense invariably make individually typed letters prohibitive, and we have to resort to duplicated letters. That these should be produced in as close imitation of individual typing as possible has been sufficiently stressed.

The Functions of Sales Letters

What are the functions of a sales letter? These are many and various, and a timely word of warning may be given against attempting too much in a sales letter. Give it only one job of work to do, and let it do that job to the utmost of its ability and power. It is never good salesmanship to try to sell two things at once, and generally it is a mistake to attempt to make a sales letter fulfil two or more purposes.

Here are some of the things which a sales letter may be expected to do :

- (1) To offer something. This is the normal function of a sales letter, and it should never be in any doubt as to what is offered, and what action is expected of the recipient.
- (2) To go before or after a salesman. Postal publicity in general, and sales letters in particular, can be of the utmost value in preparing the way for personal salesmanship, and to follow on after the salesman to consolidate his good work. This aspect of the subject properly belongs to the sphere of sales management.
- (3) To go out with sales literature in order to ensure that it will be properly and carefully studied.
- (4) To accompany pictures or photographs which are relied upon to do most of the educative or selling work. Reverting to an earlier point, it would be more correct if we regarded the pictures and photographs as accompanying the sales letters, rather than *vice versa*.
- (5) To accompany samples or specimens. The same remarks apply here as in (4) above.
- (6) To announce something, such as change of address or telephone number. Such an occasion can be made the opportunity of some good printed salesmanship.
- (7) To reply to an enquiry. This type of sales letter needs to be carefully written, because the person enquiring has already evinced interest in our product or service, and requires just exactly the right touch to convert him into a purchaser.

Regular Use of Sales Letters

Some concerns use sales letters at regular intervals, with the avowed object of keeping their names constantly before actual and prospective customers. Generally speaking, the idea is a sound one, but these once-a-month sales letters are prone to degenerate into a sheer waste of stationery and expense, because it is wrongly supposed that, so long as some sort of a letter goes out, it doesn't matter very much what it is or what it says.

No effort should be spared to make these periodical sales

letters interesting. As far as possible, without undue expense, they should be continually changed in presentation, so that instead of being old familiar friends they arrive in fresh guise each time. One simple way of getting freshness into these monthly reminders is to keep the same design of letterheads but to change the colour scheme, including the shade of paper, every month. Six different colour schemes can be adopted, and these rotated, so that the same colour scheme turns up only once every six months.

If something can be put into the sales letter which causes it to be kept at hand, or even filed, instead of simply being thrown away, the chances of it doing its job are enormously increased. Happy is the sales manager who can find some interesting and helpful piece of information to put into the "monthly reminder" which will alone make the letter worth preserving. In other words, sales letters which give information have a much greater chance of being kept than those which merely chat, no matter how entertaining they may be.

Letters Based on Last Year's Business

A relatively simple system to operate, either by means of individually dictated and typed letters, or by means of standardised sales letter, is that which is based on the previous year's business. The idea is that the sales manager has a system of recording orders received and work done, so that at any time he is able to look back and see exactly what jobs were being done at a period roughly nine or ten months back. The idea of going back nine or ten months and not twelve months is because, if it is June now, and we note that a certain job was going through in August of last year, almost certainly that job was initiated in June of last year, and therefore we must remind the customer now, so that he may (we hope) initiate something which will materialise as an actual order in two months' time. These remarks do not necessarily apply to concerns doing their business on goods already in stock, but the principle is the same.

Here is an example of a letter written in the course of carrying out such a system or referring back to what was being done last year, as a guide to whom to approach.

case with an individually dictated paragraph. Each customer thus receives what seems to be a letter which has been wholly dictated for his especial benefit. Actually, it is only the first paragraph which is really personal to him, but the personal touch achieved in this opening paragraph spreads over the remaining three, and imparts to the whole letter the aura of an individual communication.

Humour in Letters

Every postal publicity specialist is asked from time to time whether humour pays in sales letter writing. This is really an impossible question to answer. Everything depends on so many different factors. In the first place, ideas of what is funny can vary so tremendously. I may dictate a letter which I think is a perfect scream, but the man who receives it thinks that it is unmitigated drivel. This does not mean that humour has no place in postal publicity and sales letter writing. A funny letter can be very successful. Unless you are absolutely satisfied, however, that here and now is the occasion when a humorous sales letter, and only a humorous sales letter, will accomplish what you have in mind, then think again—and don't do it. Appreciate also the difference between a witty letter and a humorous letter. One can often be as witty as one likes or is able, with excellent effect, when it would be disastrous to be merely funny. A very handy compromise is sometimes arrived at by having serious wording illustrated by witty sketches, which may be only faintly relevant. What one should aim for is light relief rather than humour in large doses.

Novelty Sales Letters

Is the "novelty" or out-of-the-ordinary sales letter ever justified? Occasionally, yes; but the occasion when it can be successfully used will occur perhaps only once to fifty times when the straightforward type of letter is to be preferred. Recently a firm sent out a sales letter printed on an actual piece of the material they were aiming to sell—an artificial silk lining for men's clothes. Sales letters have been sent out printed on wood and on leather, and these may be cited as examples of the novelty sales letter. I saw one some years ago printed on three sheets of paper cut per-

fectly circular. The three sheets were fastened by a neat eyelet at the top, and certainly the letter had the quality of "differentness" which commands attention. There should always be some point about the novelty—that is, the quality of differentness should point to the heart of the sales story, and not be merely an additional source of distraction. The circular sales letter referred to above was sent out by a writing paper manufacturing house to draw attention to the "all-round" value represented by its productions.

Illustrated Letters

A letter which will make a single solid page of typing will secure more attention if it is made to extend to two pages, and is relieved by thumb-nail illustrations. These last seem to be particularly effective if they are of the type that a man with some small artistic skill could execute on the margin of a letter. In the Rotaprint process, these little sketches may be drawn direct on to the plate, or reproduced photographically.

There are fashions and fads in sales letter production, as in everything else. Keep always in mind fitness to purpose, and have the strength of mind to realise that what may be an excellent idea for someone else may be a very poor idea for you, if you are tempted to copy it.

The Signature

Who should sign the sales letter? Does a letter carry more weight if it bears the signature of the Managing Director rather than that of, say, the Sales Manager? This is a difficult question to answer. A very broad rule is that the man who wants the reply should sign the letter. When the letter deals with matters of policy, then the signature of the Managing Director is clearly needed. Sometimes a more intimate note can be struck if the letter is signed by a responsible executive, who can make a passing reference—not always complimentary—to those in authority over him. Here is a typical paragraph from a letter written in this strain:

(267) My Chairman prefers the four shades marked with a cross, but I am equally firmly of the opinion that the four marked with a star are likely to be next year's

best sellers. I ought to be right, because the Chairman's only guessing, while my selection is based on an analysis of several years' sales. What do you think?

Length of Sales Letters

How long should a sales letter be? Some heads of businesses, when commissioning a sales letter to be written, make it a firm stipulation that in no circumstances must a letter carry over to a second page. This has always seemed to me to be a particularly stupid attitude to adopt. Some sales letters I have read have contained no more than twenty lines and they have bored me. Others running to two or three full pages I have read with every enjoyment. An analogy might be drawn between the sales letter and the after-dinner speaker. Of some post-prandial speakers, three minutes is about two and a half minutes too long; while others we could listen to for half an hour.

Within reason, the length of a sales letter does not matter so long as it holds the reader's interest to the end. The most valid argument against a long sales letter is that its length may prevent the recipient from even starting it. This we must guard against by making the letter *look* interesting. Some executives who set their faces steadfastly against a two-page sales letter would not dream of telling their salesman "You must not in any circumstances ever talk to a customer for more than five minutes." The salesman's job is to get orders, and the same applies to a sales letter. It does not matter how lengthy or how brief it is, so long as it gets orders in profitable volume.

Nothing which has been written here contradicts what has gone before on how to keep sales letters as short as possible. The point here made is that it is a mistake to keep a sales letter short by omitting some, at least, of the arguments it should contain.

Aim to Get Action

A principle never to be forgotten is that the function of a sales letter is to get action, if that action is only the passive one of remembering. I may say to a salesman "Oh, yes,

your firm wrote me a letter six months ago. I never replied to it." That letter did get action. I *remembered* it.

Generally, however, we wish for some more positive and immediate action, and the sales letter should never leave in the slightest doubt the response expected of the recipient. Ask yourself these two questions: "What do I want this man to do? Does this letter make it perfectly plain that that is what I want him to do?" An excellent test of a sales letter when drafted is to show it to a colleague, and to ask him "What do I want the man who receives this letter to do?" If your colleague cannot tell you instantly, it is a bad letter.

This method of getting action has given rise to quite a technique of the "come back." This is not a very pleasant technical term, but it has the virtue of being self-explanatory. Many sales letters are sent out with post card enclosures to facilitate response. At other times a return-addressed envelope is enclosed. The Order Form blank is another very familiar and very useful form of "come back."

Nearly everyone in business is familiar to-day with the Business Reply Card and Business Reply Envelope, on which no postage is paid by the sender. By arrangement with the Post Office, the postage is collected from the recipient, plus a halfpenny a card or letter for the trouble of collection. Before one can use these Business Reply Cards and Envelopes, one must hold a licence from the Post Office. There is no charge for this.

Many firms who use these Business Reply Cards and Envelopes extensively will tell you that their use is abundantly justified by results. Certainly it is an inducement to a man to return your card for further literature, or for a request for a salesman to call, when posting the card costs nothing. Some firms go to the trouble of typing in the name and address of the prospective purchaser on the Business Reply Card, which is worded in such a way that it does not require signing or filling in in any way by the recipient. It simply has to be posted. Here is the wording from a Business Reply Card of this type:

(268) Yes, you may send me a copy, post free, of "Spun Yarns" when published.

Using "Window" Envelopes

Pursuing this point one stage further, if the name and address is typed on the card which is to be returned to the sellers from the prospective buyer, there is no need to type the name and address again on the envelope. "Window" envelopes can be used, and the card and other matter inserted in such a way that the name and address on the return card is visible through the window in the envelope, and thus is made to serve a double purpose. Window envelopes are those which have an opening cut in the front, usually covered by a transparent material such as cellophane or glassine. They are much used for invoices and statements. When they are used for ordinary correspondence, it is customary to indicate with faint lines on the letterhead exactly where the name and address should be typed, so that when folded and inserted the name and address comes exactly beneath the window.

Not all sales letters are intended to sell something out of hand, but on the principle that the greater includes the less we may use this as our example, because the letter which is expected to bring back the order with cash is the most difficult of all to write.

The Printed Order Form

Generally speaking, it pays to enclose a printed Order Form, even when this is quite small and inexpensively printed on cheap paper. The typical person hates letter writing, and if the whole order has to be laboriously written out by hand, in a large proportion of cases it simply will not eventuate. Everything should be done on the order form to make it simple to complete. Items should be listed, prices carefully quoted, cash columns provided, with a space at the bottom for the total. Where a printed order form is used, invariably it pays also to enclose a return-addressed envelope. This again may be quite cheap and flimsy, so long as it is adequate for its purpose. With sales letters and sales literature going out to a good class prospect, it is advisable to use a better quality paper for the order form and return envelope, but care should be taken not to lavish money unnecessarily on these essentially utilitarian items.

Reference was made above to Business Reply Cards and Envelopes. Before these were introduced, if a concern wished to save the recipient postage, there was nothing to do but stamp the return post card or return envelope before it was sent out. This necessarily meant a large wastage of postage stamps, but some firms even to-day prefer to put $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ stamps on all return post cards they send out, rather than adopt the Business Reply Card system. If something approaching 50 per cent. of replies is anticipated, it will be at once appreciated that to use $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ stamps on all the post cards costs very little more than to pay twopence for all those returned under the Business Reply system. (The Post Office charge $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ postage plus a halfpenny for collection.) Obviously, where over 50 per cent. of replies are received, it is cheaper to use $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ stamped post cards for everybody. It is held by some sales managers that the sight of an actually stamped post card has a greater psychological influence on the recipient than the Business Reply Card.

A relevant factor is whether the person should be addressed at a business address or home address. There is certainly something to be said for the broad rule of using Business Reply Cards when addressing business people at business addresses, and ordinary stamped reply post cards when writing to private individuals at their homes.

Sifting a Short List from a Long One

Whether or not it pays to put $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ stamps on return-addressed envelopes can only be decided in light of the special circumstances pertaining. The Business Reply Card type of "come back" is particularly valuable when it is desired to extract a small mailing list of interested persons from a very large list. Let us assume that we have a list of twenty thousand names of persons who may or may not be interested in what we have to sell. We may decide to publish a monthly house journal, and of the first issue, which we make particularly interesting, we have twenty thousand copies printed. These are sent out to the complete list we hold, and with each copy goes a business reply card which simply asks the recipient to sign and return it if he wishes to receive the second and subsequent issues of the house journal. We

might get 10 per cent. of replies, which means that we have a small, selective list of 2,000 names to which to send regularly every month. Only 10 per cent., but of these we can say this, that they were sufficiently interested to take the trouble to sign and return the post card. Of course, the percentage might easily be much higher than 10 per cent., which is merely taken as an exemplary figure. This device is sometimes referred to as sifting a short list from a long one. The subject of the mailing list will be returned to later.

The Free Gift Bait

Is it desirable to use a "bait" with postal publicity? It would be dangerous to generalise on this point. Many firms have used free gifts and free offers of various kinds as baits to get replies, with excellent results. Other firms have tried them with equally disappointing results. One thing is certain—that the free gift or free offer is going to cost the giver some good money, and powerful arguments for its use should be forthcoming before the plan is adopted. In postal publicity nothing should be done on a large scale before it has been adequately tested on a small scale; and the wise thing to do would be to test out the free gift or free offer with part of the list before it was applied to the whole. Sometimes the bait takes the form of a special discount, and the same remarks apply.

Of course, the reduced price or special discount at times has no real existence, but is merely a trick. An article which can be sold at a profit at 10s. is offered for £1, and then as a special inducement to order by return a discount of 50 per cent. is offered, bringing the price back to the 10s. which is economical. We are not discussing the ethics of this practice, but it smacks rather too much of the technique of the cheap jack auctioneer to commend it to firms of repute.

The C.O.D. Plan

The Post Office have of recent years introduced the C.O.D. or "cash on delivery" plan, of which very considerable advantage is taken by postal traders. The principle is summed up in the phrase "You pay the Postman," and the idea behind this scheme is to safeguard the public from fraudulent traders, and to facilitate the business of the honest

ones. You do not send your money in advance, but pay the postman only when the goods are actually delivered. Here again the Post Office makes a small surcharge for its trouble. The scale is as follows :

On £1	to be collected	10d.
„ £2	„ „	1s. 0d.
„ £5	„ „	1s. 2d.

and 2d. on every £5, or portion of £5, up to £40. The charge has to be paid in stamps on the Trade Charge Form. Postmen only collect the amount if it is £10 or less. Where the amount is over £10, the addressee is advised, and is required to collect the goods and to pay the specified amount at the Post Office. The amount collected is remitted to the sender by a "crossed" order similar to a Money Order.

The C.O.D. system is also applied to goods despatched by railway. Instead of the goods, the addressee receives, by registered post, a special form. To obtain delivery of this, he has to pay the Post Office the value of the goods. Not until this special form is presented to them will the Railway company make delivery of the merchandise, so the sender is protected. An additional charge of 3d. is made on consignments sent by rail.

The Post Office publish a special leaflet dealing with C.O.D. facilities, obtainable free on request. It should be carefully studied.

Nearly all concerns which send out order forms asking for cash in advance add a footnote to the effect that the goods will be sent C.O.D. if preferred.

Compiling the Mailing List

The prime essential of any system of promoting sales with letters is a good mailing list. Note carefully the adjective. The quality of the mailing list may easily be the factor which ultimately decides whether the business is run at a profit or a loss. Within reason, no trouble is too great to ensure that the right list is secured. Remember always that before a mailing list can be a source of profit it must be the subject of expenditure. In other words, you have to spend money on printed matter, on letterheads, on envelopes, on postage stamps, on labour and quite possibly on two or

three additional items, before you can hope for a penny of return. The return in any case is problematic, while the expenditure is certain. Any attempt to get business by post is in some measure a gamble. Where a poor mailing list is worked to, a normal business risk becomes a reckless gamble, with the dice heavily loaded against you.

Every postal publicity practitioner is familiar with the question "Where can we get a good mailing list?" You can build your own list from replies received to Press advertisements; you can compile your own list from a score or more sources; you can buy a list "ready made" from a postal publicity house specialising in the provision of these; you can buy old lists from other mail order houses; or you can use a combination of two or more of these methods. Perhaps the best and safest plan of all is to build your own list gradually over a term of weeks, months or years. A name and address which you get yourself (e.g., from a coupon clipped from a newspaper advertisement and returned to you) is invariably worth far more than one you buy from some outside source. In some instances—e.g., in selling a proprietary medicine for a specific complaint—it is impossible to buy lists which are of the slightest value. The only way is to advertise and build your own list from coupon enquiries. In brief, there is no golden road to the acquisition of a first-class mailing list. It can be literally a priceless possession, and like other priceless possessions, it is obtained only after the expenditure of much hard work and hard cash.

Sources of Names and Addresses

Trade and business lists may usually be compiled with comparative ease from existing sources of information such as trade papers, trade directories, etc. Lists of what may be termed private users are much more difficult to obtain, and it is here that one has to resort to Press advertising in order to discover who are the interested individuals.

Sometimes an attempt is made to overcome the difficulty by purchasing or compiling a list of persons calculated to be of the right class. For example, I may be the proprietor of a Nursery specialising in plants and shrubs of a kind rather better than the average. It occurs to me that everybody within fifty miles' range of my Nursery who either

owns a motor car or is on the telephone at his private address, or both, should be the owner of a nice garden and be sufficiently prosperous to be able to pay my prices. To obtain local telephone directories is comparatively easy, and it may also be possible to secure at least a partial list of local motor car owners. These two lists I sift and sort, and finally am left with several hundred names. The argument that these are the right class of persons to be interested in my productions is a sound one, and it might quite easily prove a very profitable list. On the other hand, instances have occurred, and will continue to occur, where firms have compiled a list in this way, only to find in practice that its use has proved unprofitable.

However and from whatever source a list is obtained, every opportunity should be taken of checking and correcting it. Business lists may be checked off against the telephone directory, trade directory or some other work or works of reference; and at times it is positively disheartening the number of errors which are disclosed by such a check. This work of checking and correcting the list should not be undertaken at long intervals, but should be a regular part of the departmental routine, and never in any circumstances allowed to be neglected, or to be done in a perfunctory manner. An unchecked list a year old is dangerous; at two years old is a menace; when three years old it will contain such a high proportion of "dead" names as to make it utterly unprofitable to use. On one occasion I received a mailing list from a firm, with the assurance that it had been checked and re-checked and was absolutely correct and up-to-date. A real check showed it to contain no less than 40 per cent. of dead and worthless names! That instance could be multiplied over and over again.

Sub-dividing the List

Though we may refer to the mailing list in the singular, in actual practice several lists may exist. In fact, it is rarely that one sees a single comprehensive list which cannot usefully be sub-divided in some way or other. Exactly how it will be sub-divided is of course governed by circumstances. The obvious broad sub-division is into (1) actual customers and (2) prospective customers. One of the reasons why it

pays to card index names and addresses, instead of keeping them on one long typed list, is that it facilitates sorting and sub-division. One of the first things to do on receiving an opening order is to transfer the appropriate name and address card from the file of prospective customers to that of actual customers.

The file of actual customers can be very usefully sub-divided into (1) Active, (2) Dormant, (3) Lapsed. How long an Active customer goes before he becomes Dormant, or a Dormant customer goes before he becomes Lapsed is determined by the nature of the commodity sold. If a customer goes twelve months without purchasing a fur coat, it is unreasonable to regard her as lapsed, because it is a very poor fur coat which wears out in a year. On the other hand, if we are selling quickly consumable goods we may regard a customer who has not purchased for three months as dormant and for nine months as lapsed, because it is perfectly obvious that some other source of supply must have been found.

The purpose of dividing our customers under these three headings should be obvious. We shall naturally send a different kind of sales promotion letter to dormant customers from that which we send to active customers; while our lapsed customers will again receive quite a different treatment. Dormant customers may require to be gently persuaded to return to the active list; while the lapsed ones obviously require to be galvanised into action.

Where lapsed customers have been written to a number of times without success, and it is felt advisable to create a new category for them, it is usual to transfer them to a file appropriately designated "Dead." Even "dead" customers should be reviewed from time to time, to see if they cannot be revived. When a firm goes out of existence, the card or other record is, of course, destroyed.

The "Double-Barrelled" List

To confine our attention for the moment to business mailing lists, these should, wherever possible, be of the "double-barrelled" type; i.e., the list should include, not only the name and address of the firm, but also the name of the individual it is desired to reach. This may be the

Managing Director, the Sales Director, the Works Manager, Chief Accountant, the Chief Engineer, and so on, according to what it is we have to sell. The foregoing remarks concerning the necessity of checking and correcting a list particularly applies to lists containing the names of specific individuals. There is something pathetic in a firm continuing to address letters to a director who resigned or died years ago. The situation is particularly ironical when the firm doing the circularising is one selling efficiency methods, or priding itself in its literature on being thoroughly up-to-date.

The utmost care should be taken to get the names of individuals spelled correctly, with the correct initials. It is hard enough to sell to a man without antagonising him at the outset by making a hash of his name. Some men in business still cling to military and naval prefixes of rank (we are not suggesting they are not fully entitled to do so) and care should be taken to get these recorded accurately.

The courtesy title of "Esq." comes before any letters following the name, e.g., Christopher Brown, Esq., M.P.; John Jones, Esq., F.R.S. Esquire is a courtesy rank, and should only be used if no actual title of rank (e.g., Hon., Rev.) is employed.

Using the Salesman to Check List

Where salesmen are employed, these are obviously in a specially favourable position to check a mailing list of actual and prospective customers. The full sales area is customarily divided into salesmen's grounds or territories, and it is a good plan to have the mailing list sub-divided to correspond with these territories. It is then a relatively simple matter to give each salesman his part of the list to check and revise as necessary, at regular intervals.

Matters of sales policy sometimes dictate that customers shall be graded. It is best to grade them on potential rather than actual business done, from the standpoint of sales promotion. This applies to prospective as well as actual customers, and the salesman on the ground is the obvious person to assist with the grading.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

How to Organise and Conduct a Mail Order Business

LET us begin with a definition of Mail Order. This is admittedly an Americanism, but it is one generally used in this country because it is much easier to say than our own native "Postal Trading." Sometimes confusion arises between the term "Mail Order" and another from America, "Direct Mail." Direct Mail is what we call postal publicity, and while mail order traders are the biggest users of direct mail, they are not the only users. Nearly everything written in this book has some reference, direct or indirect, to postal publicity, but this chapter deals specifically with that phase of the work devoted to selling goods through or by means of the post.

Types of Mail Order Business

In many instances the mail order trader is in the exact position of a retailer; with this one important difference, that he serves his customers through the post instead of over the counter. Many of the large retail stores run post order departments which have huge turnovers. This is supplementary mail order. In general mail order work, no shop or other establishment where the public can come and buy is maintained.

Of recent years, a new form of postal trading has sprung up in the form of clubs. These are sometimes known as shilling-a-week clubs, because that is the standard unit of payment. The simple principle is that twenty people club together and pay a shilling a week. The first week a pound is collected and sent off to the trader running the club; and he sends in return an article selected from his catalogue, value 20s. This goes to the club member who has secured

first place by means of a simple ballot. The second week another member gets his or her article, and so on, until every member of the club has paid 20s., and received in return goods of his or her selection to that value. The unlucky member of the club who draws number 20 in the ballot does not get his article until he has paid the full price by twenty weekly instalments. Invariably, the individual clubs are run by spare-time organisers, who are recompensed for their trouble by the firms running the clubs. It will not be necessary here to deal further with club trading, because it is something which can be attempted by large organisations only, who are prepared to invest a substantial sum before seeing any return. The most successful club trading is, of course, done by large-scale mail order houses who have developed it as an off-shoot from their regular method of business.

Our immediate concern is with the type of mail order business which may be built from relatively small beginnings. As far as ever possible, positive advice will be given, but if this chapter seems to contain an unusually large number of "don'ts," it is because the mail order traders have shown in the past, by their own sad experiences, what a lot of pitfalls there are to avoid.

The United States of America are admittedly the home of mail order trading, and over there they have developed the technique to an extraordinarily high standard of efficiency. But it is a fallacy to think that anyone of average intelligence can get hold of a few American textbooks on mail order and proceed to make a fortune in this country. Conditions here are vastly different from the United States of America, where enormous distances between large cities provide a population which has to rely very largely on postal buying, in order to obtain goods which are really up-to-date. In Britain, on the contrary, it is very difficult to get any appreciable distance from a large town; and we have therefore to rely very little on postal trading to satisfy our wants.

On the other hand, do not fly to the other extreme and assume that postal trading in this country is just a poor, unprofitable venture. As stated above, the large Stores do a very considerable trade by post; but this in itself operates against the success of the small postal trader, because the big stores with names which are household words will naturally

take the cream. The Postal Bargain pages which are published by the national newspapers on Saturdays must collectively have been responsible for the creation of hundreds of mail order traders. When one sees these pages crammed full of 2-inch single column spaces, one is certainly tempted to remark "This postal trading must be a wonderfully profitable business. Look at all the people who are engaged in it!"

That must be the subject of our second warning. It is a fallacy to assume that every postal trader who uses these postal bargain spaces makes money. The probabilities are (and I am not speaking without many years of experience) that for every one which shows a profit, ten show a loss. To the cynical advertising man a typical page of "Postal Bargains" resembles a cemetery full of headstones, symbols of departed hopes. But—and here we swing to the other extreme—given the right line or lines, postal trading can show excellent profits. I know of one advertisement costing 48s. to insert which regularly sells anything from £50 to £80 worth of goods, and this is only one instance.

Selecting the Article

Unquestionably, the secret of success in postal trading is the right article. If the wrong article is offered, the cleverest advertising in the world cannot bring success. The right article wrongly advertised would probably prove a failure; and the obvious right and sound course is to find the right article, to prove it to be right by advertising, and then seek to improve the advertising in every tiny detail until maximum results are obtained.

What line shall be selected? This is a question really impossible to answer. Make a close, analytical study of the bargain spaces of the national newspapers for at least three months, and discover the advertisements which appear regularly. It is safe to assume that these are profitable, and the lines which they offer are the right ones. One eminent authority on mail order has stated that an article, to be successfully sold by post, must either be a distinct novelty or have a worth-while price advantage. In other words, if you have an ingenious little patent, you may sell this at a price which shows you several hundred per cent. profit.

On the other hand, if you are selling "bread and butter" goods, you must be in a position to show your customers real savings to compensate them for the trouble of writing. That is the crux of the whole matter. We hate writing letters and going to the trouble of buying postal orders or writing out cheques, and will only be induced to do so if there is a very definite *quid pro quo*. Too many would-be mail order traders fool themselves with the question "Why shouldn't they buy this from me?" when the real question is "Why *should* they buy this from me?" Unless you can get a convincing answer to that second question, then think again, and again, and again, before you spend money on advertising.

Surprising though it may seem, the best mail order lines are not necessities. One might think on superficial examination that something which the public must buy to live would provide an ideal mail order line. This is not so. A very shrewd old North Country business man once told me that if I wanted to make money I should set out either to feed the public or to entertain them. And when he spoke of food, he did not mean plain, solid fare, but what might be termed the palate-ticklers or little luxuries of the poor man's table. Food and drink can be sold through the post, but the perishable nature of the goods makes it a somewhat hazardous undertaking. The entertainment line is certainly exploited in the form of sports goods, games, gaming devices, and so on. It is a good point to remember that the great majority of working-class people lead very dull and monotonous lives, and they respond easily to anything which will provide them with brightness and entertainment. In a phrase, they are eager for novelty.

Another highroad to a man's pocket is through his hobby. A man who is a gardening enthusiast will perhaps deny himself clothes he really needs, but a bargain offer of some particularly choice roots will send him trotting off to the post office for a postal order. In the same way, a philatelist will go without beer and tobacco to add some new specimen to his collection. If you are looking for a mail order line, consider very carefully how you can cater for persons' hobbies.

The Factor of Repeat Orders

A very important factor to remember in establishing a mail order business is that of repeat orders. If you are selling musical instruments, for example, and you sell a man an accordion, you cannot reasonably expect him to come back in two or three months and purchase another. On the other hand, if you sell a man a camera you have at least a reasonable chance of selling him films, though he will probably buy these from a local chemist. Selling clothes by mail order has this advantage, that clothes wear out and have to be replaced. *Without repeat orders to look forward to, the difficulty of making a mail order business pay is increased perhaps ten-fold.*

Getting General Distribution

Mail order is sometimes used as the thin edge of the wedge in getting general trade distribution. For example, supposing I hit upon a really excellent prescription for a rheumatism liniment. I have a quantity made up and offer it through the post. It gives every satisfaction, and more and more orders come in. After a time, whether I seek it or not, orders begin to reach me through wholesale channels, which means that someone who has purchased from me has gone to his chemist and attempted to obtain my liniment. When I have secured a reasonable number of users, I can approach chemists to stock my liniment, and though it may be uphill work at first, I can gradually build up a trade connection. I encourage direct purchasers to go to their chemists for future supplies, because this will help me to secure retailers' co-operation. If I am fortunate and work hard, I may eventually arrive at the stage which was my original goal, of supplying my liniment only through chemists' shops. By this time I am doing national advertising, not to get direct orders as at first, but to send people into the chemists' shops. This is a hypothetical instance, but the procedure is one which has been followed successfully many times.

By far the greater part of mail order trade is done on actual goods, but there is a form which deals in service. An example of this is the service which invites amateur photographers to send films for developing and printing. As a

side line, such a concern may sell new films, but primarily their business is a service. The dyeing, cleaning and renovation of garments may be cited as a further example of a postal service.

The Free Gift Lure

Because it is so ubiquitous, one may here touch upon the Free Gift in mail order trading. Beyond question, the free gift does attract, and to offer a pair of botany wool socks with every pair of shoes purchased is a bait which certainly does appeal to the less sophisticated type of buyer. The free gift idea, when properly and fairly exploited, is a legitimate part of mail order technique ; but a free gift offer will not save a badly conceived principal offer from disaster.

Buying for Mail Order

Quite a number of mail order businesses are successfully conducted without any stock being purchased. X may decide to enter the mail order business as a purveyor of the famous Melton Mowbray Pork Pies. He can go to a wholesale manufacturer of these Pies, and learn exactly what he can purchase at what prices. He then prepares an attractive advertisement, and inserts it as a Saturday Postal Bargain in one or more papers. If on Tuesday morning he receives orders for 200 Pork Pies, then he goes along to the pie-makers, and arranges with them for 200 to be despatched to the names and addresses he provides. He may not actually see the Pork Pies at all ; and as he never purchases until he knows how many he has sold, he runs no risk of bad stock. Exactly the same principle can, of course, be applied to many other lines, not necessarily perishable foodstuffs.

In other classes of mail order trading, one has to take risks in the purchase of goods. For example, Y aims to capitalise as a mail order trader his expert knowledge of the textile trade. His plan is to offer in the women's journals bargain parcels of fabrics for home dressmakers' use. He is able to offer excellent value, because he goes to the mills and buys up odd lengths, remainders, goods which are not quite perfect, discontinued lines, and so on. The secrets of his success are, first, knowing how to buy very keenly ; and, second, having the ready money to pay cash, thus

securing the largest possible margin of discount. This form of mail order trading calls for expert knowledge of both buying and selling.

Manufacturing for Mail Order

Occasionally, some novel idea is hit upon which lends itself to home workshop manufacture. Usually this manufacturing for mail order selling is done as a side line to an existing business. For example, we may be manufacturing cutlery, and one of our men invents a new and novel kind of breadknife. Instead of selling this through the trade, we decide to manufacture it and sell it direct to the public through the post. (We are not concerned here with whether this would or would not be a wise move, but simply with the fact that such a thing could be done, if it were considered advisable.)

Of course, concerns which sell courses of instruction in the technique of mail order trading tell wonderful stories of men who have started to make some little article in their back bedrooms and from this have developed to the ownership of colossal factories. While these stories are invariably exaggerated, there is in them a germ of truth. A cabinet maker might be able in time to build up a considerable mail order business, starting with the products of his own skilled hands.

Where to Advertise

Having found or invented the right article, and written what we hope is the right advertisement (this point we shall return to later), then we have to decide where to insert the advertisement. There are recognised mail order media, and amongst these the national daily newspapers naturally take the leading place. Because the percentage of people who will respond to mail order offers must of necessity be very small, it follows that the mail order trader must cast his net as widely as possible; and, generally speaking, the bigger the circulation of the paper, the better it pays the postal trader. Make a collection of newspapers and periodicals with circulations of a million or over, and you will automatically make a collection of good mail order

media, as examination of the advertisement columns of the publications will prove.

In mail order trading, it is a disastrous fallacy to assume that a start can be made on a modest scale by advertising in papers with very low rates. The mail order trader learns that a certain advertising media has a rate of £10 per single column inch. He decides he cannot afford this, and argues that if he can find a paper in which he can buy space at £1 per inch, surely this will produce 10 per cent. results of the first medium. He may find that so far from producing 10 per cent. of the results of its higher priced contemporary, it actually produces no results at all! Any advertising man well versed in mail order technique will confirm that the best results are invariably obtained from the media with the highest rates. To make mail order pay, you have to buy appearances of your advertisement by the million, and not by the tens of thousands.

Test Everything

No mail order trader with any experience would dream of inserting an advertisement in several media without first having tested it very carefully in one. It is an excellent rule in this form of trading to test everything. Take nothing for granted. Test your article, test the price, test the name, test the address from which you propose to sell it, test the type of advertising you propose to do, test the headline, test the wording, test the medium, and so on. Test, test, TEST! If I were a mail order trader, I should have written up above my desk in very large characters "You Don't Know; You Only Think You Know."

Because the national newspapers go into homes of every description in the country and all over the country, the postal bargain pages of the *Daily Express*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mail*, *News-Chronicle*, *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Mirror* provide the ideal testing ground for a mail order proposition. One should be used as a test to begin with; which one must be determined by the nature of the article or service offered.

Some mail order lines may be tried out through the classified columns, preferably of newspapers with a reputation for good classified results. *The Times* and the *Daily*

Telegraph will immediately be brought to mind: but here we have two papers with better class circulations, so their classified columns can only be used for articles appealing to a more cultured and educated class. Some popular periodicals and magazines run classified columns, and the fact that these are consistently used by mail order houses which have been established for many years points to their being profitable media.

If what you have to offer appeals specifically or exclusively to women, then you should consider very carefully concentrating your advertising on the women's journals. The same principle holds good here; the journals with the highest advertising rates and the biggest circulations will invariably be found to be the most profitable. Then there is the specialist Press—gardening papers for horticultural offers; motoring papers for motoring offers, and so on. These "class" publications have not circulations running into huge figures, but there is present a compensating factor in the form of a highly concentrated interest.

Exclusively Postal Advertising

Nearly every mail order trader, at some early stage in his career, plays with the idea of dispensing with Press advertising altogether, and using postal circularising in its place. Postal advertising in this form can be very profitable when used as a follow-up system; but failure invariably attends any attempt to take a list of names, for example, from a telephone directory, and to circularise them at random. Any mail order trader can go along to a firm which specialises in postal publicity and circularising work, and purchase a list of ten thousand, twenty thousand, or fifty thousand names and addresses of good class householders. It certainly never pays to circularise such a list with a view to establishing a mail order connection. Enquiries *must* be obtained through the medium of Press advertising—that seems to be the lesson to be learned from the experience of thousands of postal traders.

Mail Order Advertising Technique

There is, of course, a vast and involved technique of mail order advertising, and this book would need to be several

times its length if this subject were to be dealt with at all comprehensively. The most which can be done is to state broadly some fundamental principles of successful mail order advertising.

Don't aim for prettiness in mail order advertising. Advertising space costs money, and to make it pay the mail order trader should cram his advertisement as full as he can get it. Time and again, established mail order houses have attempted to "modernise" their advertising, by using larger illustrations, plenty of white space, beautiful typography, and so on, only to find that results have fallen away almost to nothing. Their return to the old technique of the small space packed full of copy, with perhaps a tiny illustration, has been accomplished with the swiftness of a rifle bullet.

No one can dogmatise as to what is the minimum or maximum size of space. Experienced mail order traders will tell you that they have to experiment to find out what is the most profitable space to take in any given medium. One national newspaper may give them the best results, i.e., the greatest profit per pound spent, when they use 6-inch single column spaces. With another newspaper they may find they get their best results with a 4-inch single column; and when in this particular paper they go beyond this space results at once begin to drop. It is true that more replies are received, but not in proportion to the extra cost. The size of space which gives the best results is sometimes referred to as the "optimum" space, and this will vary quite widely between different media. Once you have found an advertising medium which gives you reasonably good results, experiment with it, enlarging and reducing your space until you discover the optimum for that particular publication. Then stick to it until you feel that a further experiment is justified, to discover whether the optimum space has altered.

An illustration in a mail order advertisement may be worth many hundreds of words of copy. Generally speaking, the unillustrated mail order advertisement is at a serious disadvantage compared with that which is illustrated.

Some form of a guarantee of satisfaction or money refunded is a distinct asset to the typical mail order advertisement.

When relatively small spaces are occupied, it invariably pays to have these inserted next to editorial matter or in special positions, though these will be charged extra for. The surcharge for "next matter" position may be as high as 25 per cent. but if 40 to 50 per cent. more replies are received, the cost per reply is obviously lower.

How soon an advertisement can be repeated in a journal which has proved successful is a point which can only be learned from experience. Mail order traders find it sometimes pays to discontinue using a medium from time to time. When advertising is resumed, improved results are obtained.

In mail order trading, the whole of the selling has to be done by the printed word and picture. A point which has to be early decided is whether the advertisement can safely be left to sell the article or service outright, or whether the function of the advertisement will be to get an enquiry, the actual selling being done by the sales literature which goes out in response to that enquiry. The apotheosis of mail order success is, of course, thousands of letters each containing a postal order or cheque. It is not always feasible, however, for the advertisement to do the whole of the selling, when recourse must be had to sales literature. The advertisement which has to extract the actual cash is naturally harder to write successfully than that which is intended to do no more than get the maximum number of enquiries—for literature, samples, price lists, etc.

Method of Payment

A matter which must be early decided is whether the article shall be sold for cash, or on the instalment plan. Sending goods C.O.D., the recipient paying the postman, is really a cash transaction. The ideal obviously is to get cash in full with order, but some mail order houses make a virtue of necessity, and offer goods on gradual payments. Broadly speaking, only goods of really high quality should be sold on the instalment plan, because dissatisfaction in use invariably leads to a discontinuance of the payments, acrimonious correspondence, and quite possibly legal proceedings. All this is very distasteful to the genuine trader, and to offer rubbishy goods on an easy payment plan is not only bad ethics but bad business.

In recent years some very big businesses have been built up by concerns selling female wearing apparel through the post, on easy payments. These concerns work on the very sound principle that a garment must continue to look smart and give every satisfaction in wear for a period longer than that covered by the instalments. To give a woman two years in which to pay for a garment which wears out in one is to invite trouble with no uncertain voice.

Sometimes the instalment plan is featured as one of the principal sales arguments. At other times, an attempt is made to sell the article for cash, and when the order is not forthcoming, as a "special favour" and a "great concession" the offer is made to accept payment by instalments. The mail order trader has to decide which is the right method for him. In any case, an allowance must be made for bad debts. There was a time when 2 per cent. allowance for bad debts was considered adequate, but to-day a minimum allowance of 5 per cent. would probably be nearer the mark. Years of experience and adequate capital are required successfully to run an instalment trading mail order business, and the new-comer to this field would be well advised to commence on a modest scale, and on strictly cash basis. Do not venture into deep water until you have learned to swim.

When to Advertise

This is a factor which sometimes receives all too scant attention or is completely ignored. The beginner might be tempted to think that to advertise when other advertisers were holding back would give him an advantage, because his own advertising would have less competition to contend with. Another fallacy, for if other and far more experienced advertisers have decided that the present is not a good time, then it is unwise for the beginner to venture. Generally, the winter months are better for mail order than the summer. People are outdoors in the summer, on holidays, or otherwise engaged, and they have less time to study advertisements and to take the necessary steps to buy by post. For certain lines, the period immediately before a holiday is a good one, but during the actual holiday itself is a very bad time, as examination of the newspapers will prove. Adver-

tising space can be bought very cheaply at holiday times, for the simple reason that scarcely anybody wants it.

Quite apart from the meteorological seasons, there are the right seasons and the wrong seasons for all classes of goods. With some lines it may be profitable only to advertise for about eight weeks in the year, and to remain dormant for the rest of the time. It is therefore a great advantage for a mail order trader to have a number of lines which sell best at different seasons of the year, so they may be exploited consecutively, and thus maintain a steady flow of business. A broad rule is, when your most successful competitor is advertising most heavily is the best season of the year.

Dealing With the Enquiry

In cases where the actual advertisement is expected to bring the direct order, either accompanied by cash or with a promise to pay C.O.D., dealing with the enquiry is really dealing with the order, and the prompt and accurate execution of this is the action required. If for any reason it is impossible to execute the order, a letter of explanation must be immediately sent, and the money refunded. This is important, as people who send money by post and do not immediately receive the goods have a way of writing to the newspapers carrying the advertisement, and also to the police. A visit of enquiry from a police sergeant may be a disturbing experience to the beginner in mail order, but to have your advertisements refused by the newspapers is even more serious.

Where the function of the advertisement is to get the initial enquiry, and the sales literature is relied upon to turn interest into order, everything possible should be done to ensure that the printed matter is persuasive and convincing, without being unduly expensive. The writing, designing and general production of mail order literature is a highly specialised branch of advertising, and exigencies of space forbid its exhaustive treatment here. The following rules for its production may, however, be laid down for general guidance:

- (1) It should be copiously, even lavishly, illustrated.
- (2) Illustrations of the article(s) offered should be as large as possible.

- (3) To show is better than to tell ; i.e., cut down description as far as possible by the use of pictures.
- (4) Any essential information should be given twice. (This is a tenet of mail order work.)
- (5) Prices should be clearly given.
- (6) Colour should be used as freely as considerations of cost will allow.
- (7) Size and substance (of paper) should be such as will ensure undamaged travel through the post.
- (8) "How to Order" should be made absolutely clear and simple.

Follow-up Systems

What happens when you have sent out your literature but the anticipated order does not materialise ? In rare instances it may be decided that it is not worth while to write again. This is most exceptional, however, because if an article is low priced, it is best to sell it direct from the advertisement. On the other hand, if the article is of a price to make it inadvisable to attempt to sell it from the advertisement, but to rely upon printed matter ; then selling costs should be so calculated as to allow at least one, and possibly two or three, "follow-ups," which is the term generally applied to all matter sent out after the original literature and first sales letter.

The number of "follow-up" communications which may profitably be used, their nature, and the intervals at which they may be sent out are factors which can be decided only after a most careful and analytical study of the particular product and business. Clearly, in selling an article costing £10 one can afford to "follow-up" a greater number of times, and with more elaborate literature, than when selling something at £1.

Some mail order houses have a plan whereby a given batch of names, probably running into several hundreds or even thousands, obtained from a Press advertising campaign, are followed up at short intervals, for as long as each "shot" produces sufficient business to pay for itself and leave behind a margin of profit. As soon as it costs more to follow up

that particular batch of names than the business obtained is worth, then it is held that that list is exhausted, and no further money is spent on it, for the time being at least. This last qualification is necessary, because even when immediate following up fails to be profitable, the names are usually added to a general list, which may be circularised six months or a year later.

The story is told of an American mail order expert who joined a firm and found hampers full of these old names. He had them carefully sifted and sorted, and set to work with postal publicity. He is stated to have produced hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of business from these names, which his predecessors in office regarded as worthless. This particular story may be apocryphal, but the moral is none the less good, because the principle is sound.

Generally speaking, a mail order house sooner or later discovers by experience how many times it is profitable to follow up an enquiry, and a definite and more or less rigid system is laid down. This last is most important, because when thousands of enquiries are received every week or every month, they must be dealt with systematically, if costs are to be kept within reasonable bounds. Dealing with the enquiries on more individualised lines might produce better business, but the extra cost involved would make it not worth while.

In deciding the interval which shall elapse between sending the original literature and the first follow-up, and the first follow-up and the second follow-up, and so on, one has to strike the happy mean between importuning the customer, and allowing such a long interval to elapse that his original interest has evaporated, and the follow-up literature is thrown on one side unread. Very broadly speaking, it is held by postal publicity specialists that to send the first follow-up out in under ten to fourteen days is to risk annoying the recipient; while to leave it longer than three weeks is to run the risk of his interest fading away, or of his requirements being satisfied from some other source.

The last factor is most important. I may see the advertisement of a firm which specialises in renting Radio Sets. I am rather impressed by the advantages of renting Radio as distinct from buying a set, and I write for particulars.

Because my interest has been aroused in this way, I notice two or three further advertisements of other concerns offering similar facilities. Nothing is more natural than that I should write to these concerns also, so that within two or three days I shall receive literature from three or four concerns all offering Radio Renting facilities. Here is an instance of where any follow-up work must be done smartly; otherwise the follow-up will arrive after I have definitely closed with one of the offers.

If what you are offering is a patented article, or one in which you have a monopoly, then the danger of the business going elsewhere is not so great, if it exists at all.

It will occur to every shrewd mail order dealer to complete the coupons of his rivals to obtain their literature and to study their follow-up methods. On your side you should assume that your competitors know exactly what you are doing about a week after you commence to do it.

Operating a Costing System

An efficient costing system is vital to success in mail order work. Broadly, costs will fall under two heads—those which may be grouped as Overheads, being expenses which will be incurred whether or not any business is done; and Selling Expenses, which will include advertising, sales literature, postages, stationery, etc. etc.

When a mail order business is first started, and relatively little business is being done, it is obviously improper to load the overheads on to the small amount of business being transacted; and the only way one can work is to arrive at some reasonable figure representing anticipated business, and to calculate overhead charges as a percentage of this. For example, one might budget to do a turn-over of £500 a week, and to have overhead expenses totalling £30 a week. Thus, of every pound received from sales 2s. would be earmarked for overheads. Selling costs in mail order are naturally very heavy, and sometimes the prime cost of the article has to be multiplied by three or four to arrive at the selling price to the public. For example, a little patented gadget selling for 2s. should not cost more than 6d. to 8d. to produce, at the most. Sometimes even this cost would prove prohibitive. Two factors which are of paramount importance, and which

can be discovered only from practical experience, are *Cost per Enquiry* and *Cost per Sale*.

A reference was made above to budgeting, and what is known as Budgetary Control is really the only sound system on which a mail order business can be conducted. There may be, however, the most disturbing differences between a theoretical budget, and what actually transpires. Nothing is easier than to plan a business on paper, and to show oneself a handsome profit—also on paper. The real difficulties crop up when it is attempted to translate the theoretical budget into practice, and to make the paper profit an actual one. This does not mean to say that a theoretical budget is not a sound starting point. It is, but at best it is only theoretical, and can never be more than a purely provisional plan on which to start operations.

An Exemplary Budget

Let us assume we have invented a Suction Cleaner of a new type, which is excellent value for 39s. 6d. Tests made through a retail store show that the public buy it readily at this price.

The basis of the budget is the Costing Statement. Until you know your costs, you cannot work out a budget. Pursuing our example of the Suction Cleaner, let us assume that our costs, known and estimated, are as follows :

	s.	d.
Prime Cost of Article	15	0
Packing and Carriage	2	6
Sales Expenses, including Advertising	12	0
Overheads	5	0
Profit	5	0
	<hr/>	
Selling Price of Article	£1	19 6

From this simple statement of costs we can work out a budget. Our total overheads, including a margin for contingencies, are £30 per week. We have allowed 5s. per unit ; and have therefore to maintain an average sale of 120 Suction Cleaners a week. Our total sales expense per unit is 12s., which means we can spend £72 (120 times 12s.) a week on this item. Can we, on £72 worth of advertising,

printed matter, etc., sell 120 Suction Cleaners? That is one of the things only experience will show.

We can now frame our Weekly Budget, simply by multiplying each item in the cost statement by 120, the number of units to be sold.

Manufacturing costs of 120 Suction

Cleaners	£90	0	0
Packing and Carriage	£15	0	0
Sales Expense	£72	0	0
Overheads	£30	0	0
Profit	£30	0	0

Receipts from sales £237 0 0

To illustrate the point of how a carefully planned budget can be made the starting point of many other calculations, we may take the question of Capital. It may be decided that in view of the nature of the business, a looked-for return of 25 per cent. per annum is reasonable. £30 multiplied by 52 is £1,560, which is 25 per cent. on £6,240, the capital justified *on paper* by the *estimated* profits. (Elementary prudence would dictate that we should not actually invest such a sum until we are very sure of our ground.)

It should be made clear that this is a hypothetical instance, and therefore open to criticism. The principle involved is thoroughly sound, that *no mail order business should be launched until such a budget has been drawn up*. Actual experience will inevitably show that some items have been over-estimated, while other items have been under-estimated. The budget must be revised again and again in the light of actual experience until theory has been replaced by concrete facts. Certain items in the budget, such as Purchasing or Production Costs and Overheads, will be easily determined and more or less fixed. The elastic items are on the sales side. Because we know what our production costs are and what overhead expenses we must meet, and also what profit we must have left behind to make the whole thing worth while, we are able eventually to narrow it down to the point where we know exactly how much we can afford to pay for a sale. When we have established what percentage of sales to

enquiries may be expected, then we are able to move one stage further and say definitely how much we can afford to pay for an enquiry. For example, we may decide that we can afford a total sales expense of £1 per unit. (What the *unit* is, of course, is governed by what it is we are selling.) If we find that we can convert only 10 per cent. of enquiries into actual sales, then clearly we must get our enquiries at a rate no higher than 2s. each.

The Conversion Ratio

The executives of any successful and well conducted mail order business can tell you how much they can afford to pay for an enquiry from a Press advertisement, and exactly how much they can afford to pay for a sale. These figures are the acid test. Retaining the figures of our previous example—2s. for an enquiry and £1 for a sale—any advertising medium used which consistently pulls enquiries at the rate of 2s. each, or less, is retained on the list. Any medium which runs out higher than 2s. on two or three tests is dropped. It sometimes happens that an advertising medium will produce enquiries at a rate which can be afforded, but when these are analysed for sales, it is found that the average percentage of 10 per cent. is not forthcoming, and the cost per sale is therefore higher than £1. In other words, though the advertising medium in question is able to produce enquiries at 2s. each or less, these enquiries are not of a good class, and perhaps only 4 or 5 per cent. can be converted into orders. The advertising medium is then dropped, not because of high cost per enquiry, but because of low percentage of conversion. The conversion ratio (enquiries into sales) is a very important factor.

The Ethical Aspects of Mail Order Trading

It cannot be denied that a terrible amount of rubbish is foisted on to the public by means of mail order advertising. Without being cynical, it can be said that while there is a large and unsophisticated section of the public to be duped, there will always be those unscrupulous individuals who will take advantage of this fact. There is nothing whatever unethical about the mail order method of trading; and every reputable operator in this field is only too delighted

when he learns of some near-dishonest practitioner being driven out of business. With very few exceptions, the Press exercises a rigid censorship of mail order traders' announcements ; and the leading newspapers and periodicals absolutely refuse to accept advertisements of the catchpenny kind. Some advertisements which are published are not above suspicion, and it is hoped that the control now exercised will actually be tightened up in the future, rather than slackened. The Advertising Association has a special department (A.I.D.) dealing with advertising which is suspect, and much excellent work has been done to clip the wings of the unscrupulous mail order trader.

Legal Aspects

An exhaustive examination of the legal aspects of advertising and the sale of goods generally, and mail order work in particular, must properly be left to those who are qualified to undertake it. One or two points, however, may be briefly examined here, in order to indicate the nature of the legal aspects with which the ambitious mail order trader should take an early opportunity of making himself thoroughly acquainted.

What has to be chiefly guarded against, is any form of misrepresentation. The law recognises two forms of misrepresentation—innocent and fraudulent. These two terms sufficiently explain themselves. Supposing a mail order trader were offered a large bankrupt stock of cutlery, which was described at the time of purchase as genuine Sheffield cutlery. He offers it to the public with the same description; and it is subsequently proved that the cutlery did not come from Sheffield at all, but from some foreign source. If the mail order trader can satisfy the authorities that he was genuinely under the impression that the cutlery was made in Sheffield, England, being himself misled on this point, the misrepresentation would in all probability be held to be innocent. The remedy in the case of innocent misrepresentation is that the purchaser can recover his money, but no damages. This would probably apply in the instance just cited. There is no need to give here an example of fraudulent misrepresentation (one is given below), but it can be simply stated that where fraud is proved, the victim

can recover any money he has paid, and damages in addition.

Of course, there is enormous scope for argument as to what is or is not misrepresentation. It is not a simple matter of the truth or a lie. Contrary to what might be expected, the Law is prepared in certain circumstances to turn a tolerant eye on what is false. The terms "puff" and "advertising flamboyance" are sometimes applied to these misstatements at which the Law winks.

For example, I may be a cosmetican by profession, and I evolve a recipe for a really remarkable skin rejuvenating cream. I may think, rightly or wrongly, that I stand very little chance of selling this cream by mail order at a price which would make the whole venture worth while, if I tell the simple truth about it. So I invent an entirely fictitious story of a Persian Princess who handed over this recipe to my great-grandmother in gratitude for saving her life. The secret having been jealously guarded in my family for generations, I have now decided to prepare a limited quantity of the cream for the general public. This is not a convincing story, baldly related, but one which may conceivably have some effect on sales to a certain section of the community, when suitably "dressed up."

If someone purchased my cream and subsequently discovered that the story of the Persian Princess was a mere figment of my imagination, it is extremely questionable whether any action could be taken. In all probability, if the case came to court, it would be ruled that my story of the Persian Princess was mere advertising flamboyance, not intended to be taken seriously.

Supposing that instead of inventing the story of the Persian Princess, however, I make a claim for my cream that it contains the active principle of radium, when as a matter of fact it does nothing of the sort. This would certainly amount to fraudulent misrepresentation, and I should be very properly punished by being made to pay damages to any purchaser who claimed them.

The difference between the two cases is this. In the first instance I offered a cream which really did have a rejuvenating and generally beneficial effect upon the skin. My harmless tarradiddle about the Persian Princess did not make the

cream one bit less valuable. In short, I did not misrepresent what was offered for sale, but only the method by which the "recipe" came into my possession. In the second instance, however, I clearly stated that the cream was radioactive, when it was nothing of the sort. I misrepresented what I had to sell ; I did it deliberately with intent to deceive and to obtain money by false pretences ; therefore I am guilty of fraudulent misrepresentation.

It is not suggested for one moment that it is necessary to invent stories about Persian Princesses in order to sell cosmetics by post. Nothing is stronger than the truth, and when really worth-while merchandise is offered it should not be necessary to go beyond the confines of the strict truth in order to sell it. No one can blame the mail order trader for discovering the most attractive way to present the truth about his goods, but that is a different matter.

What is a Guarantee ?

Reference has been made in an earlier chapter (page 23) to the loose way in which the word "guarantee" is used in advertising. To say "This watch is guaranteed" is utterly meaningless. The statement "This watch is guaranteed solid silver" is a little better, but not much, because what is meant is that the watch is warranted solid silver. The word "guarantee" should be used only when protection is afforded against some possible eventuality. "This watch is guaranteed for seven years to keep accurate time" clearly means that should the watch fail to be a good time-keeper at any time up to seven years, the purchaser may return it to the makers for free adjustment. This is an example of the correct use of the word "guarantee." Here are three further examples :

- (270) Guaranteed for three years against defects in material and workmanship.
- (271) Guaranteed to wear white throughout.
- (272) Guaranteed not to warp or shrink.

For a guarantee to be worth anything it must be in writing, and it must clearly set out exactly what is guaranteed, and

under what conditions. In giving a guarantee of anything of a mechanical nature, the makers usually safeguard themselves by stipulating that the article shall be used in a proper manner and not be subjected to abuse. Just exactly as the seller can introduce into any contract for sale such conditions as he sees fit, so any concern issuing a guarantee can attach to it whatever conditions are considered necessary, or advisable. Guarantees should not be given promiscuously, but a carefully drawn up guarantee can in certain circumstances be a powerful means of overcoming a specific sales obstacle.

Breach of Warranty

A warranty is a different thing from a guarantee. A warranty may be implied as well as specifically stated. For example, I might buy from a mail order trader a grandfather clock. The original advertisement and the literature which is received by post make great play upon the beautiful cabinet work and the lovely tone of the Westminster Chimes. The clock is delivered, and I have to admit that the cabinet work is everything which is claimed for it. Moreover, the chimes are very sweet-toned. Unfortunately, however, the actual mechanism of the clock is of an inferior nature, and my enjoyment of the chimes is seriously discounted by the fact that the clock stops on an average once every two hours. I study the advertising literature again, and find that the question of mechanism is very skilfully skirted round and glossed over, and certainly no guarantee was given that the clock would go. Surely there is present, however, a clear implied warranty, inasmuch as one does not buy a grandfather clock primarily for the beauty of the cabinet work or the sweetness of the chimes, but in order to tell the time. If the firm refused to refund my money, it would be open to me to bring an action on the grounds that there had been a breach of warranty.

This matter of specific or implied warranty is obviously one which the mail order trader requires to study very carefully. It may be argued that if worthy merchandise is sold at fair prices, one need not fear actions for breach of warranty. This is perfectly true, but at the same time it must be remembered that unscrupulousness is not confined to the

seller, and there are many buyers who seek to take an unfair advantage. The mail order trader may very easily find himself the subject of attempted victimisation by some unscrupulous member of the public, and should know the strength of his own position.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Office Organisation

THE term "office" is a wide one, and it should be made clear that here we are referring to administration offices, as distinct from the Sales Office, the Works Office, the Counting House, and so on. The term "organisation" is itself a much abused one; and the experienced business executive usually looks with suspicion on the man who describes himself as "a good organiser." All too often this means that he cannot do anything productive himself, but is prepared to make himself a thorough nuisance to others who have real work to do. But having stripped organisation and efficiency methods of the specious nonsense which is written and talked about them, we have something solid and genuine left.

The Office Manual

Organisation means the systematic carrying out of clearly defined duties. A business which works smoothly, efficiently and economically, is well organised, though there may be no written record of any system or plan. A sound organisation working like a well-oiled machine may be evolved in the course of time, and such improvements and developments as are possible are introduced quietly and gradually without any disruption.

On the other hand, with a new business, or a business which is growing very rapidly, it is an excellent idea to set down in clear, concise, written form, exactly what work is to be done, how, when, by whom, and so on. The result may be anything from a few typewritten sheets to a printed book running into a hundred or more pages, according to the nature of the business. This is the Office Manual, and it is not unusual for a separate one to be prepared for the sales

department, under the title of Sales Manual. It is not usual for the Office Manual to concern itself specifically with matters of sales, and only touches upon the subject sufficiently to make it perfectly clear to all concerned where the functions of the administrative offices impinge on those of the sales department. In a mail order business, the administrative offices and the sales office are usually one.

The main idea behind the production of an Office Manual is in order to prevent the shirking of responsibility, and the operation of that "shunting" device for which we have no exact expression, but which is known in America as "passing the buck."

Where no Office Manual exists, what very often happens is that the new-comer to the office staff finds himself or herself gradually being loaded up with all the unpleasant tasks by the other members of the staff. Inexperience may cause these tasks to be accepted, but when the initiation period has passed, and the latest joined member of the staff finds out what has happened, the reverse process begins, and as far as ever possible the unpleasant tasks are pushed back on to those who previously had them.

This sort of thing certainly does not make for efficiency, and one of the objects of the Office Manual is to make it perfectly clear by whom the various duties should be performed. In this way responsibility is pinned down, and much careless and slipshod work is obviated. It is notoriously true that anybody's job is nobody's job in an office, and the Office Manual should leave no loophole for neglect. Needless to say, the Manual requires to be kept up-to-date, and from time to time complete revision should be undertaken in the light nature of more mature experience, business development, outside conditions, and so on.

Organise for Duties

The administrative offices of no two businesses will be organised in exactly the same way. The best plan is to organise for duties and not for individuals. For example, somebody must be in charge of the office, and where a large number of girls are employed an Office Manageress is indicated. The Managing Director usually requires the services

of a personal secretary. Thus we have two sets of duties—those of the Office Manageress, and those of the Managing Director's secretary. In a large concern these duties will be performed by two individuals; but in a smaller concern it is perfectly feasible for both sets of duties to be performed by one worker.

Somebody must be responsible for the outgoing post, and one girl may easily have the duties of Junior Typist and Post Clerk. Another girl may perform the duties of Stenographer and Filing Clerk. The point is that one individual may be performing two, three, or four sets of duties, and the Office Manual should set out clearly what these duties are. Later it may be decided by whom those duties may be performed. For example, it may be found necessary to add another member to the office staff. One girl is relieved of the responsibility of looking after the stationery, another girl of the filing, and a third girl of the despatch of the post. These three sets of duties are combined and given to the newly recruited member to perform. No change whatever in organisation is required; it is simply a matter of the redistribution of established duties. From time to time, of course, new duties are created, when these should be carefully embodied in the Office Manual, and allotted to some member of the staff.

Secretary or Shorthand-Typist?

Reference has been made in an earlier chapter (page 44) to the difference between secretarial duties and those of a stenographer, and this point may be briefly returned to here. A personal private secretary has duties in excess of those of the ordinary shorthand-typist. Normally, a shorthand-typist takes dictation and transcribes this. The typed original letter, the carbon copies and any previous correspondence handled are returned to the dictator, who signs the original letter, passes it out for post, and disposes of the other papers as he sees fit. On the other hand, a private secretary may do much more than this. In some cases, the executive merely indicates what kind of letter is to be written, and this is put into the right phraseology by the secretary, who also decides what is to be done with the carbon copies, previous correspondence, etc.

The material point is that where a shorthand-typist only is employed, it is the responsibility of the dictator to watch the correspondence to see that a proper reply is received, and any further necessary action is taken. Where a secretary is employed, the executive is relieved of this responsibility, and the secretary carefully watches all correspondence and brings to the notice of her chief such matters as require his attention. In simple terms, the efficient secretary operates as the memory of her employer. She is often entrusted with his diary, and makes or declines appointments according to circumstances. A personal or private secretary occupies a key position, and as such her duties should be clearly set out in the Office Manual. Not much space will need to be devoted in the Office Manual to the work of the shorthand-typist, as this is perfectly straightforward and very largely a matter of routine.

Responsibility for Filing

A piece of plain paper is virtually worthless, but once it is used to take a carbon copy of a letter it may become a very valuable document. Not infrequently, it is just as important to be able to produce a carbon copy of a letter in order to prove what it did *not* contain as it is to prove what it did contain. The point should not need stressing that an efficient filing system is the backbone of any office organisation. A letter filed in a wrong place may take hours to find, or never be found at all. In far too many offices the work of filing letters or documents is left to irresponsible juniors, who perform it in a most perfunctory manner, thinking that it is the putting away which is important, whereas it is the finding again that matters.

Metal cabinets with drawers running on roller or ball bearings are the most efficient, and it will be assumed that these are the type employed. An adequate number of cabinets should be provided, and for ease of reference no drawer should ever be more than two-thirds or three-quarters full. If a drawer is packed so tightly with papers that any required correspondence cannot be easily withdrawn, much time is wasted and the possibility of error in filing is increased. Alphabetical guide cards should be used, and where much correspondence is conducted with one

firm, it is best for this firm to have its own file or jacket within the alphabetical index. At times, so much correspondence is conducted with one concern that quite separate box files can be maintained. This removal of very heavy correspondence from the general files is a distinct advantage, as it facilitates reference and prevents the general file from being unduly packed with masses of correspondence to relatively few concerns. The pattern of box file to use for this extracted correspondence is that which secures the papers in position by means of two punched holes. Loose correspondence is dangerous and untidy.

Filing should be done in strict alphabetical order, and not merely in approximate order. Some filing clerks seem to imagine that to push a letter addressed, for example, to John Hardy, anywhere in the H file is good enough. It is not. Another slipshod practice which should not be tolerated is to file the letter carefully alphabetically, but incorrectly as regards date. All correspondence should be filed in strict date order, with the most recent letter, in or out, on top. Correspondence need not be filed so that it can be read through like a book from beginning to end. When we require to refer to correspondence, we are much more likely to be concerned with the letter we wrote yesterday than the one we wrote two months ago; it is therefore perfectly logical to find the most recent letter on top.

Current, Recent and Remote Files

A warning has been given against allowing correspondence files to become over-full and difficult to refer to. This means that from time to time old correspondence must be withdrawn, or new cabinets installed and the filing re-arranged. How long correspondence should be kept on file before it can safely be removed will, of course, be governed by the nature of the business. The Office Manual should lay it down how old correspondence should be before it may be removed from the current file; also at what intervals this important work should be done.

Generally speaking, it is a good plan for the filing system of a concern to be subdivided into three stages, to which

may be applied the terms, Current, Recent and Remote. The Current files contain the correspondence for, say, the last six to nine months, assuming that the files are cleared quarterly. The Recent files contain correspondence removed from the Current files, and up to two years old. The Remote files contain correspondence over two years old.

This does not mean that expensive metal filing cabinets will be used exclusively for Current, Recent and Remote correspondence.

A good plan is to keep the Current correspondence in metal filing cabinets easy of access. The recent correspondence may be kept in suitable cardboard boxes provided these are clearly labelled on the outside as to their contents. When the correspondence is removed from these cardboard boxes, i.e., when it is old enough to be removed from the Recent to the Remote, it may be made up into brown paper parcels, again clearly marked on the outside as to contents. Normally, the Current files are kept in the administrative offices; the Recent files may be kept in a store-room or other suitable place; while the Remote files may be stored in a cellar or basement.

Reference to the Recent files may be fairly frequent, but if the parcels of Remote correspondence have to be disturbed more than two or three times a year, it is a sign that the system requires overhauling, as the files are being emptied too soon. Some concerns may find it advisable to keep correspondence in the Current file up to two years. Everything depends upon the nature of the business, but whatever is decided should be clearly stated in the Office Manual, so that the filing clerk has no excuse for any inefficient work.

There are times when a reasonable doubt exists as to where a certain piece of correspondence should be filed. For example the Managing Director receives a personal letter from his good friend, Mr. Christopher Jones, who is the Advertisement Manager of *Everyman's Monthly*, which is published by the Zenith Publishing Company. Mr. Jones' name, together with those of his periodical and his publishing house, all appear on the letterhead. Shall the girl file it under J for Jones, E for Everyman's or under Z for Zenith?

This is the sort of thing which can very usefully be made the subject of a rule, which might be that where a Limited Company is concerned the correspondence shall be filed under the name of that company. This would mean that without any hesitation the filing clerk would file Mr. Jones' letter under Z for Zenith.

Cross Referencing

Where for any reason there may be doubt as to the letter under which correspondence should be filed, a cross reference should be placed in the file in those places where the correspondence might be looked for, directing the searcher to that place in the file where the correspondence will be found. For example, to pursue the same illustration, under the appropriate place in the J file a sheet of paper might be filed bearing the following words: "Jones—Mr. Christopher; see Zenith Publishing Company, Ltd."

Needless to say, this cross-referencing should not be carried to extremes, because it makes more work and helps to fill the files. It should be used only for important correspondence where reasonable doubt exists. As far as ever possible the system should be governed by definite principles clearly laid down in the Office Manual.

Bring Forward

The important question of a Bring Forward file has already received some attention. The principle is a simple one. We write an important letter to a firm, and give them ten days in which to reply. The correspondence is therefore labelled with a brightly coloured slip (see page 33) to be brought forward ten days hence. Usually it is the duty of a personal secretary to attend to correspondence to be brought forward, and an excellent plan is to have a file with thirty-one divisions. The correspondence is then placed in the division according to how many days ahead it is to be brought forward. Thus, on the 7th of the month correspondence marked to be brought forward in seven days is placed in the 14th division and so on. In certain months the 29th, 30th and 31st divisions are ignored. Care should be taken to see that no correspondence is filed to be brought forward on a date which falls on a Sunday or a holiday. Usually, the day before is chosen,

i.e., if matter marked to be brought forward in ten days' time falls on a Sunday it is altered to Saturday and brought forward in nine days' time. In some concerns it is a rule not to mark the correspondence to be brought forward on a Saturday, as this is a short working day. Another useful idea is to deal with as much unanswered correspondence as possible on a Monday, because this day has the lightest post of the week, less letters naturally being written on a Saturday.

Removing Correspondence from Files

The best regulated filing system can be reduced to chaos if all and sundry are allowed to go to the files and lift out correspondence. One person should be made responsible for the files, and all applications for correspondence should be made to this individual. When correspondence is removed, a distinctively coloured sheet, preferably bright red or bright orange, should have briefly written on it the nature of the correspondence removed and into whose custody it was given. This is placed in the file, so that any failure to return correspondence within a reasonable time is detected. The logical development of this system is to get whoever removes the correspondence to initial the red sheet. When the correspondence is returned, the person returning it should ask for and destroy the red sheet, so that there can be no argument at a later date.

It may be argued that in a busy concern no one can be spared to operate such a system, but it should be understood that its purpose is not to consume time but to save it. It is far better to consume two minutes' time for operating some such central system as that suggested, than to have the time of several responsible persons wasted for two or three hours searching for certain correspondence which the Chairman has called for, which most mysteriously is not in the file and cannot be found. In short, it is better to invest five minutes in system than to waste five hours in vain regrets when something goes seriously wrong.

"Watch" Files

Some executives like to maintain their own "Watch" files, but a warning has already been given about these

Watch files generating into homes of rest for tired and aged correspondence. Sometimes these Watch files are optimistically marked "In Action" but "Inaction" would seem to be a more appropriate label. It is very annoying for a director to call for correspondence which cannot be found, only for it to transpire some time later that another member of the staff was "watching" it! The right place for correspondence, when all is said and done, is where it will be looked for if it is wanted.

In cases where a watching eye is useful, it is a much better plan to have an extra carbon taken of the letter in question, and to watch this; leaving the correspondence proper to find its way to the file in the ordinary way. These "watching" carbons can be done on distinctively coloured paper, and if not required may be destroyed. In exactly the same way, extra carbons can be taken on tinted paper, for the information of other executives and other departments. The same principle applies—the less the actual original correspondence is bandied about, the more likely it is to be found when wanted.

Collated Correspondence

We now come to a difficult and somewhat controversial point. A certain piece of business may be projected or in the course of execution, and a number of letters are written in regard to it. These letters may go to a number of different firms, branches, departments, etc. Each sends its own letters in reply, and very shortly a mass of correspondence is in hand emanating from and proceeding to a number of firms and individuals. Should this correspondence be at once dispersed into the files under the various names, or should it be kept together until the business is completed? It is impossible to lay down any hard and fast rule; everything must depend on circumstances. If we say "No, the correspondence should not be dispersed, but be kept together in a special jacket until the matter is completed, in the possession of a responsible executive," then it may be that no correspondence at all will reach the files from this executive, except at very rare intervals! He is virtually conducting his own filing system, or rather, allowing correspondence to pile up on his desk. Only really important and confidential

correspondence should be retained in this way by the executive. All other correspondence should be allowed to go to the files, with occasional carbon copies retained by the executive to act as reminders. Where the correspondence is retained, it should be kept in a special jacket or folder with the nature of the correspondence clearly marked on the outside. These folders should be kept in a separate drawer in the executive's desk, or in a filing cabinet in his room, under the care of a secretary, so that one can always be found if wanted.

In a large concern inter-departmental communications may take on considerable importance, and these should be treated exactly the same as out-going correspondence, so far as carbon copies are concerned.

Dispersing Correspondence

Sooner or later this particular piece of business will be concluded and out of the executive's hands. What should happen to the correspondence then? Should it be broken up and sorted out under the different firms' names, or retained together in one file for ease of reference? If it is disturbed, it may be difficult and may take some time to bring it together again, should any query crop up at a later date. On the other hand, if the correspondence is kept all together, under which name is it to be filed?

It sometimes happens that in addition to the correspondence there are a large number of other documents. Where are these to go if the actual letters are sorted out and filed? They must not be destroyed, as they embody important data. The best plan in these circumstances is to place the whole of the correspondence in a stout manila envelope, together with all appropriate documents, and to type or write on the outside of the envelope a brief précis of the contents. The envelope is then filed in a special file. The date when the papers were placed in the envelope should be clearly marked on the outside, and the envelope filed in chronological order. If it is thought advisable, cross-references can be made in the correspondence file proper. A logical development of this system is to number the envelopes very boldly, and to cross-reference by number.

Thus one might find on the file some such reference as this :

Equitable Building Company & Ubiquitous Insurance Corporation—correspondence with regarding fire at Stonewall Factory ; see special file No. 87.

This cross-reference would need to be duplicated, one copy being filed under Equitable and the other under Ubiquitous.

Where a mass of correspondence is filed in this way, the papers should be sorted into some sort of order before being filed, and chronological sequence is as good as any. Where out-going telegrams are used, carbon copies of these should be kept in the file, as they may provide important evidence. Telephone conversations may also prove to be important, and these should be confirmed by letter the same day in order that a proper record may be kept. This is particularly important when prices are quoted on the telephone.

There is a system now in operation which makes a record on a cylinder of telephone conversations, after the manner of a Dictaphone (the instrument is marketed by the same company), for later transcription. In this way an absolute verbatim report of telephone conversations is obtained.

Printed Forms

Efficient office organisation is greatly facilitated if printed forms are provided for the carrying out of routine tasks. One clerk should be made responsible for the maintenance of proper stocks of stationery, and he or she should be given a form (if it is only typed) on which all stationery items are recorded, together with the figure below which the stock should not be allowed to fall. For example, this form may record the fact that the stock of Letterheads No. 4B should never be allowed to fall below 2,000. Immediately the stock does fall to this figure the matter should be reported in writing to the Stationery Buyer. Similarly, all members of the staff should be instructed that stationery will only be issued on written demands, and if necessary a printed form should be provided for this purpose.

These Stationery Stocks and Stationery Requisition Forms are cited merely as examples. Instructions to Works, Studios and other productive departments should be issued only on proper printed forms, and carbon copies kept. There can then never be any argument as to who was told to do what, when and by whom. To give a concrete example, a firm of printers have their own commercial art studio. All Studio Instruction Sheets are prepared in triplicate. A white copy goes to the Studio Manager, as his authority to proceed with the work. A pink copy goes to the Production Manager and is placed on a special file—it may be nothing more elaborate than a bulldog clip on a nail. It is not removed until the job is completed, and the white copy comes back from the studio, complete with particulars of artist who did the work, time occupied, materials used, etc. Reference at any time to the file of pink copies will therefore instantly show exactly what work is in the studio, so that promises and plans may be made accordingly. A blue copy is taken at the same time, and this is filed in a Job File with all the other papers relating to that particular job, so that the Production Manager can see that there is no undue delay in carrying out any part of the work.

All Works Requisition Forms, Studio Instruction Sheets, and similar forms should be numbered consecutively. The most handy size is Large Post 4^{to}, 10½ x 8½ inches, as this facilitates filing with carbon copies of correspondence, etc.

Organising the Post Despatch Department

A sign of a badly organised office is the chaotic conditions prevailing at the time when the post goes out in the late afternoon. Letters beautifully typed on expensive die-stamped paper are hastily and crookedly folded by juniors with none-too-clean fingers, stuffed into envelopes anyhow, and the envelope sketchily sealed with the flap all awry, and the postage stamp put on anywhere within an inch or two inches of its correct position, and most probably crooked. Several separate envelopes are done for a single concern and postage is wasted. The letters are hastily and incorrectly entered in a post book, which is probably found the next

morning to be 1s. 2d. short, so that the office boy has to proceed to "cook" it.

This is not an exaggerated picture, and many executives who pride themselves on the careful and conscientious way in which their correspondence is conducted would be appalled if they could see what happens in their own post department. Nearly always the source of the trouble is haste. Letters pour in from all departments at the last minute, and a quite natural antipathy to working overtime leads to their being dealt with in the deplorable manner described above.

Organisation of correspondence should most certainly extend to the post despatch department, which should be supervised by a responsible individual and be one of the most carefully planned sections of the office. Wherever possible the entire post should be scrutinised by someone in authority before it is taken to the Post Office. Any slipshod work should be the subject of an immediate and severe reprimand.

Wrong addresses; incomplete addresses; letters sent to the right firm but to the wrong branch; photographs and drawings sent out without any proper protection; important documents folded in an ugly and unnecessary fashion in order to stuff them into too-small envelopes; large envelopes with heavy contents sent out without the safeguard of string; small items made up into wastefully large packages—these are the faults which should be continually watched for. Again, it must be stressed that careful and conscientious work in the early stages can be ruined by carelessness in the despatch department.

In a business of any size, the position of post despatch clerk is one of some responsibility. One has only to examine a copy of the Post Office Guide to realise what a complicated business the conveyance of mails has become in these times. The post despatch clerk should have more than a mere working knowledge of the Post Office Guide, which she should regard as her Bible. Quite apart from any other consideration of efficiency, an intelligent post despatch clerk can save her firm good money by studying the Post Office regulations, and learning how to send letters and parcels through the post at the lowest rates.

The careful study of Post Office regulations is particularly important in a mail order or other business where considerable postal circularising is done. The regulations governing the despatch of a printed circular should be most carefully studied, and every care taken to see that they are not contravened.

1½d. or 2½d. Rate?

It is hoped that the reader will not expect to find here an exhaustive examination of the age-old controversial question of whether it is better, in postal advertising, to use the 1½d. (unsealed, printed matter) rate, or the 2½d. (sealed, letter) rate. This point has been discussed *ad nauseam* at conferences and association meetings, and the inevitable conclusion, "it all depends," arrived at.

Look at the matter in this way. To use the 2½d. letter rate, when the 1½d. printed matter rate might be used, is to increase the postage cost by nearly 100 per cent. In every other phase of postal publicity an avoidable increase of cost of 10 per cent., let alone 100 per cent., would be looked at askance. Clearly, before it can be agreed for an item of cost which probably amounts to thousands of pounds in the course of a year to be increased by 100 per cent., the most overwhelming evidence of improved sales results must be adduced. The only satisfactory method is to make a test, or short series of tests. Nearly always it will be proved that the 2½d. rate gives very little if any greater percentage of orders or replies than the 1½d. rate.

The advocates of 1½d. rate argue that a letter to a private address gets opened anyway, whether it is 1½d. or 2½d. stamped; while a letter to a business address is opened by a member of the staff detailed for this duty, so again the question of 1½d. or 2½d. rate does not arise.

Letters addressed to individuals marked "Personal," "Private" or "Confidential," and sent under seal may reach the addressee unopened, but if the contents prove not to be of a personal, private or confidential nature, annoyance is caused, and the initial success in slipping through the guard is discounted.

One pertinent instance may be quoted. A concern manufacturing medicinal preparations regularly circularised

doctors. They paid the $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ rate, believing that this was necessary when writing to professional men. As an experiment, they sent out a "shot" under a $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ stamp, and actually got an exceptionally high percentage of replies! They have used the $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ rate consistently since, with perfectly satisfactory results.

Give yourself, and not the Post Office, the benefit of the doubt and use the $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ rate, unless and until you are absolutely satisfied you lose your money by so doing.

Envelopes can be purchased which though they have one end open for possible Post Office inspection look exactly like a sealed envelope when closed.

Instead of postage stamps, a franking machine can be used, and the impress of this has to be carefully examined to see whether it is a $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ or $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ rate which has been paid. The use of the envelope just described and the franking machine jointly result in a communication which has some pretensions to deceive.

Timing the Mails

Some regular users of postal publicity believe that a letter which arrives by the late morning or early afternoon post receives greater attention, because it has less competition, and time their outgoing mails accordingly. There is something in this contention, but the idea should be carefully tested before being generally adopted.

Choosing the Day

In choosing the day of the week to send out postal publicity matter, care should be taken to avoid unfavourable days. For example, the retailers' busiest days are Fridays and Saturdays, and therefore posting on Thursdays and Fridays should be avoided. Posting on Saturday for Monday delivery has a pro and a con. It is usually a light day for post, and anything received gets attention. On the other hand, the retailer may have a "Monday morning feeling," and not be in a receptive mood.

The month end and quarter day should be avoided, for obvious reasons. The post is often regarded as "under suspicion" at these times. Holiday times, and times of

public rejoicing, are also unsuitable. What should be aimed for is to time your postal publicity to go out when conditions are normal.

Addressing Machines

Addressing machines are almost as familiar to-day as typewriters—certainly as familiar as duplicators. Essentially, they work on the same system. Stencils bearing the names and addresses are fed into the machine at one part and envelopes at another. The printing of the name and address, in facsimile typewriter characters, on the envelope is automatic, and thousands of envelopes can be dealt with in a very short time.

Addressing machines and systems can be simple or elaborate as circumstances demand. The more elaborate machines are capable of selecting certain names and addresses and rejecting others, so that a list, in its entirety or in sections may be circularised at will. Similarly, the stencils used may be simple, consisting only of a frame and the necessary stencil silk, or they may be combined stencils and index cards, with spaces for written information. The stencils may be cut on an ordinary typewriter, or they may be of such a nature that the firm supplying the addressing machine has to prepare the stencils, or a separate machine for making them.

Another system does not employ stencils in the exact meaning of the word, but metal plates on which the characters are embossed by a special machine. The embossed characters are then printed from through a ribbon, giving a facsimile typewritten appearance. These are correctly termed plates, not stencils.

Almost always, the stencil or plate is unobtrusively completed with a reference number, which also prints. This serves a variety of purposes. For example, the coded reference number DX/39/8737 may mean that the original enquiry was received from an advertisement in the *Daily Express*, the "bait" was a special offer for which the code number is 39, and the enquiry was received on the eighth day of the seventh month of '37, i.e., 8th July, 1937. Such a system facilitates the sorting of stencils into groups, where this is done by hand.

Some firms prefer not to address envelopes, but to stencil

or print the name and address on the letter itself, which is subsequently folded and sent out in a "window" envelope (see page 110). The letterhead and stencil can be so designed that the reference number comes immediately below the printed injunction: "When replying, please quote this number."

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